DICK HAMILTON'S TOURING CAR

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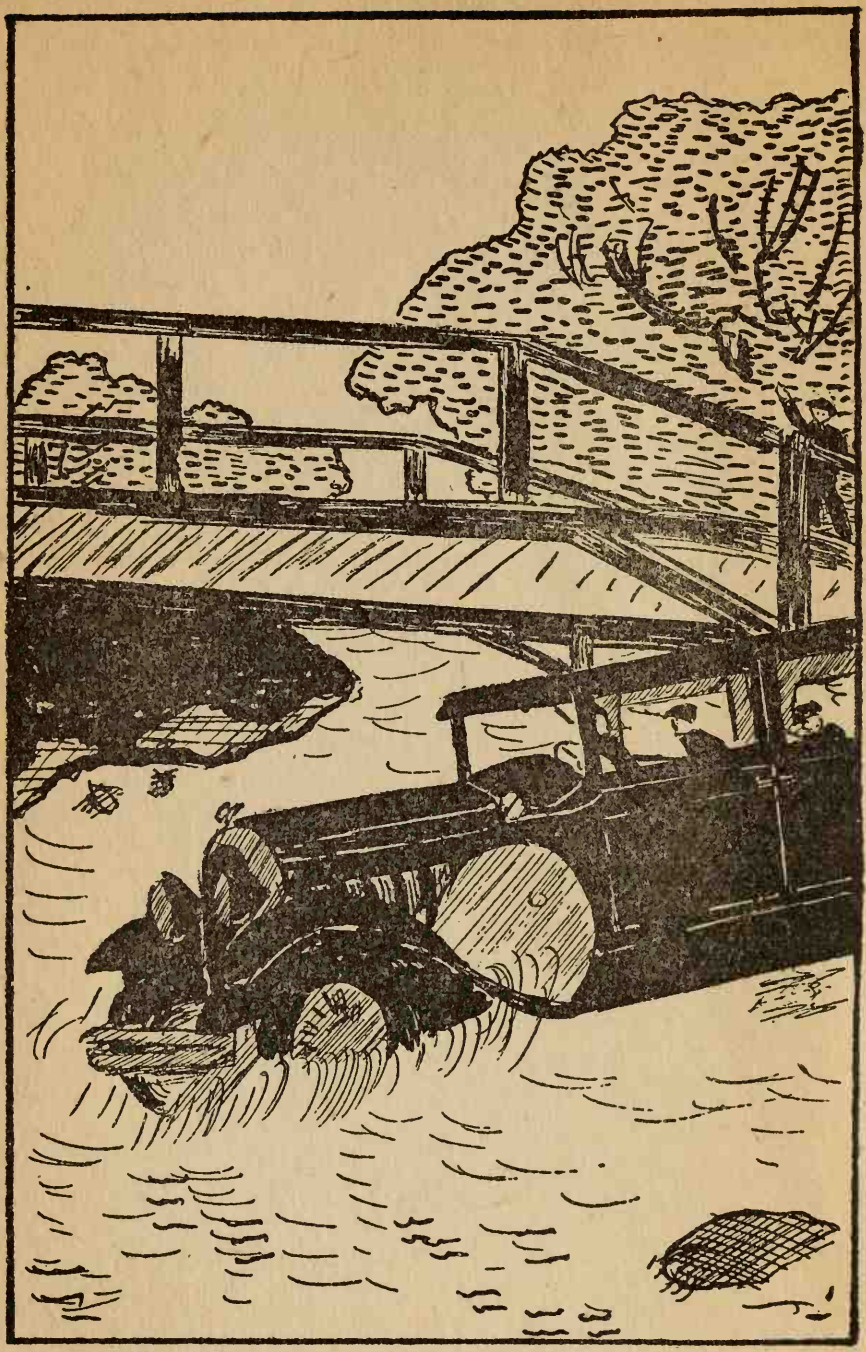

INTO THE WATER SPLASHED THE BIG TOURING CAR.

Dick Hamilton's Touring Car. *Frontispiece*—(*Page* 168.)

DICK HAMILTON'S TOURING CAR

OR

A YOUNG MILLIONAIRE'S RACE FOR A FORTUNE

BY

HOWARD R. GARIS

AUTHOR OF "DICK HAMILTON'S FORTUNE," "DICK HAMILTON'S STEAM YACHT," "FROM OFFICE BOY TO REPORTER," LARRY DEXTER AND THE STOLEN BOY," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

THE SAALFIELD PUBLISHING CO.

AKRON, OHIO **NEW YORK**

MADE IN U. S. A.

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PREFACE

My Dear Boys:

I am not going to detain you long over this, for, if you are anything like I was, when I was your age, you don't want a lengthy introduction. But I just want a moment or so of your time, to explain something of the kind of story this is—a sort of bill of fare, as it were.

This is an account of how the young millionaire, Dick Hamilton, unexpectedly did a great service for a stranger, and how, later learning that this same stranger needed help in saving his fortune, Dick took strenuous action.

For excellence in his studies at the Kentfield Military Academy, Dick's father gave him his choice of any automobile he wished. Dick found just the kind of a touring car he wanted—one large enough to sleep and live in, as he and his friends traveled about.

In this car, which Dick named the *Last Word*, the boys set out for San Francisco. What happened to them on the way, how they foiled the plans of Dick's Uncle Ezra, how they came upon the strange man in the great salt desert, and how, in an exciting race, they tried to save him and

blocked the plans of those who would take Mr. Wardell's fortune from him—all this you may read of in this book.

It is the fifth volume of the "Dick Hamilton Series," and that you will like it as well as you have the preceding ones is the sincere wish of your friend,

HOWARD R. GARIS.

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DICK HAMILTON'S TOURING CAR

CHAPTER I

QUEER ACTIONS

"HERE'S cheerful news—not!" exclaimed Dick Hamilton, as he tossed a letter on the bed of the room occupied by himself and his chum, Paul Drew, at the Kentfield Military Academy. "Nice, rich, juicy news, Paul!"

"What's the matter, old man? Has some one sent you a bill?"

"No, but it's a note from my Uncle Ezra Larabee, of Dankville, saying he's coming to pay me a visit. Whew!"

"A visit from Uncle Ezra; eh? Isn't he that sour-faced man who hates your bulldog, Grit, and who thinks football is a waste of time?"

"That's the man, Paul. And he's the same uncle who tried to kidnap me, to teach me how sinful it was to go off and have a good time on my yacht. Oh, he's the limit!"

"But if there isn't any love lost between you, why is he coming here, Dick? I think you told me he was about as near to being a miser as it's possible to get, and it costs money to come here from Dankville."

"Oh, he isn't coming specially to see me—you

can make up your mind to that, Paul. I'm only a side issue. Let's see what he says," and Dick took up the letter again. "'Dear Nephew Richard,'" he read—"he never calls me anything but Richard, you know. 'I hope you are doing well in your studies'—no, that isn't it—'I trust you have gotten rid of your savage dog'—no, it isn't there—quiet, Grit!" he called to a handsome-homely dog in one corner of the room, the intelligent beast having growled instinctively at the mention of Uncle Ezra's name.

"Let's see, where is that part of his note?" went on Dick, leafing over the sheet. "He's wasteful enough of paper, ink and words, if he isn't of money. Oh, here it is. 'I have some business to attend to near Kentfield, and after I have finished I will run over and see you.'

"There you are, Paul. You see he's only coming to see me as an after-thought. Probably he knows I'll ask him to take dinner with me in the mess hall, and he can save the price of a sandwich and a cup of coffee. Oh, Uncle Ezra is mighty saving!"

"He must be."

"Well, he won't be here until afternoon, Paul. So let's take advantage of it and go for a walk. You haven't anything on; have you?"

"No; drill's over and I'm through with lectures. I'm with you. Where do you want to go?"

"Oh, anywhere. Let's walk out toward the

hills. It's more like the country there, and with summer almost here I always want to get out in the woods and fields."

"The same with me. It won't be long until vacation now. What are you going to do, Dick?"

"I don't know," replied the young millionaire, musingly, as he donned a fatigue uniform. "Dad did think of going to Europe, and if he does I shall probably go with him. But I'd rather put in a good time on this side, with some of the fellows. What's your programme, Paul?"

"It's up to the folks, and they haven't made up their minds yet. It's always a toss-up between the mountains and the seashore. I generally vote for the shore, though I wouldn't mind a trip across the mill-pond. However, I suppose I'll have to stick with the family. Well, are you ready?"

"Yes. Come along, Grit!" and Dick had to brace himself against the demonstrative leaps of the fine animal that was delighted at going on a jaunt with his master.

"I guess I'll leave word that if Uncle Ezra should come in while we're out, he can wait here for us," went on Dick, and on his way out he spoke to the care-taker in charge of the dormitory.

"I have to be decent to him, if he did treat me pretty mean," went on Dick. "After all,

he thinks he's doing right, and he is my dead mother's brother."

"Did he say what his business was around here?" asked Paul.

"No, but you can be pretty sure it is something to do with money. Probably Uncle Ezra is coming to collect some bill."

"I'm glad I don't owe him anything, Dick."

"The same here. He'd get the last penny from you. I pity anyone who does owe him, if he can't pay. Here, Grit, you never mind that cat," for the bulldog, with a low growl and a raising of the hair on the ridge of his back, had shown an inclination to chase a cat that scuttled across the drive from the barrack stables where the troop horses of the military academy were kept.

"That must be a strange feline," remarked Paul. "Grit knows all the regulars."

"Guess you're right, Paul. There goes Beeby. Hi, Innis!" Dick called to a tall cadet, crossing the parade ground. "Want to come for a walk?"

"Can't—I've got some work to do."

"'Work was made for slaves,'" quoted Paul.

"Then I'm a slave," retorted Innis Beeby. "See you later," and he turned into his dormitory.

Paul and Dick kept on by themselves, meeting chums and acquaintances occasionally, until they were well away from the military academy, swinging along a country road at a good pace—

heads up, shoulders back and with a true military carriage, attained only after long practice.

"Which way?" asked Paul, as they came to a place where the road branched off, one highway leading to Lake Wagatook, and the other to a small town about two miles away.

"Let's go in to Westville. I want to see about getting a new collar for Grit. No, I didn't call you," he said to the bulldog, who came back on hearing his name.

"On to Westville then," assented Paul, and not until some time afterward did either of them realize how their choice of roads that day had to do with an important epoch in the life of a certain young man.

About half way to Westville the highway was crossed by a railroad embankment, the road being carried under it by a big culvert. It was on approaching this embankment that Paul, looking up, and seeing the figure of a man on the tracks, called Dick's attention to him.

"Look there!" he exclaimed. "That fellow's acting mighty queer, Dick. I've been noticing him ever since we came in sight of the railroad. Watch him."

Dick looked up. The man on the track above them did not seem aware of their presence. He would walk along the embankment a short distance, pause, and seem to be contemplating the rails; then, with an odd gesture would retrace his steps.

"You're right, Paul, he does act queer," agreed Dick. "I wonder what he's up to?"

"I don't know. Let's watch him a bit longer. He doesn't seem to be paying any attention to us."

As they looked, the man sat down on a pile of stones near the edge of the track, and began looking through his pockets. He seemed to find what he wanted—a bit of paper that fluttered in the wind—and then, placing it on his knee he began to write.

"He's making notes," said Dick.

"Maybe he's a track walker, and he's found some defect in the rails," suggested Paul.

"Track-walkers don't dress that way. He's got a tailor-made suit on."

"That's so, Dick. I wonder who he is?"

Whatever the man was writing did not seem to take long, for he soon arose. Then the two cadets saw him carefully pin the paper he had written to the inner pocket of his coat.

"Well, what do you know about that?" demanded Dick.

"It looks strange," admitted Paul. "He sure isn't going to lose that paper."

As he spoke the man resumed his pacing of the track. He came to the edge of the concrete bridge that carried the railroad over the highway, paused a moment, and then, with a shake of his head, retraced his steps. Then he came to a pause at the place where he had rested to write

the note. He looked down the embankment, and once more shook his head.

Suddenly the whistle of an approaching train was heard, though it was some distance off, and would not be along for several minutes. At the sound the man on the tracks threw his hands upward with a tragic gesture.

"Paul!" cried Dick, "there's something wrong with that man! Maybe he's partly insane and doesn't realize his danger. I'm going up and tell him to get off the track."

"Maybe it would be a good idea, Dick. Go ahead—I'm with you."

The cadets scrambled up the yielding ashes and earth that formed the elevated embankment. As they advanced they could hear the distant rumbling of the approaching train. The man who had acted so strangely now saw them, but only regarded them with a sort of melancholy smile, and did not hasten away.

"I beg your pardon," panted Dick, as he walked toward the stranger somewhat winded after his climb, "but it's dangerous up here. There's a train coming."

"Thank you, I know it." The man spoke calmly, in contrast with his queer actions.

"I thought perhaps you might be a stranger around here," the young cadet resumed. "There are two trains that pass here about the same time. You might get out of the way of one, and step in the path of the other."

"Thank you for the warning," said the man. "I—er—I——"

He hesitated, and seemed to be struggling with some emotion.

"Perhaps I had better get off the track— for the present," he said, slowly.

"You had, if you don't want to be killed!" exclaimed Dick, with a laugh that took the grim meaning from the words. "I guess we'd all better. The trains are getting nearer, and it's too good a world to leave by way of the iron route."

"Is it a good world?" asked the man, suddenly.

"I find it so," answered the cadet. "Especially in this kind of weather, and vacation so near at hand; eh, Paul?"

"That's right!"

"You are students at the Kentfield Academy then?"

"Yes. Better move a bit faster. Here comes the express. It will pass the local on the bridge, I guess. Yes, there they both come."

Whistles from the locomotives of the two approaching trains, which rounded curves at this point, showed that the two engineers had seen the figures on the track.

"That's for us!" exclaimed Paul, quickly.

The stranger did not answer, but slowly followed Dick, who scrambled down the embankment. Ere they reached the lower level the trains rushed thunderously past in a cloud of dust and cinders.

"Now you can walk the track with more safety," remarked Dick to the man. "There won't be another train for three hours."

"Thank you, I think I'll go the rest of my journey by the highway," and the man, with a little bow, turned aside, going in the direction from which the boys had come. As he walked along Paul turned in time to see him take from his pocket the note he had pinned there and tear it up, scattering the fragments along the road.

For a few moments Paul and Dick walked along in silence, Grit following at their heels. Then Paul spoke.

"Dick!" he exclaimed, "do you know I think you saved that man from committing suicide!"

"Suicide! Nonsense, Paul!"

"That's right. If I ever saw despair and hopelessness on a man's face it was on his."

"Well, he didn't look very happy, that's a fact. But what had that to do with an intention to take his own life?"

"Lots, when you think of the way he acted."

"Oh, you imagine it."

"I do not! I believe he came here with the intention of throwing himself under a train, or at least allowing himself to be struck by one. I believe he wrote a note of farewell, and pinned it in his pocket so it wouldn't get lost. Just see how queer he acted! No one would stay on the track the way he did, with two trains coming, unless he had it in mind to get hurt. No, Dick,

you can say what you like, but I believe your going up when you did, and talking to him, saved his life."

"Well, I'd like to think that I did that for a fellow being, Paul; but I still can't admit it."

"It's true, whether you admit it or not. You saved his life, and some day you'll know it, or I'm mistaken."

"Oh, nonsense!"

"No nonsense at all. You'll see. That man was at the end of his rope—he was all in. He was in despair, and he wasn't a common sort, either. He comes of a good family, I can see that. And the way you talked to him, just at the right moment—saying this was a pretty good old world after all—you saved his life, Dick—at least for a time."

"Get out!" But in spite of his denial Dick felt glad that he had done what he had. And it was not until some time after that he learned what really had taken place. Under strange circumstances he was to meet that man again.

CHAPTER II

UNCLE EZRA

"QUIET, Grit! What's the matter, old fellow?"

"He seems to think some one is in our room," said Paul Drew. He and Dick had returned from their walk, Grit resplendent in a new, brass-studded collar, and the dog had shown signs of resentful excitement on nearing the door of the room where the two chums lodged.

"I wonder——?" began Dick, and then, as he opened the door, and saw a rather grizzled man standing near the window—a man with a queer little tuft of whiskers on his chin—Dick exclaimed:

"Uncle Ezra!"

"Yes, Nephew Richard. I am here. I got through my business sooner than I expected and came over."

"I'm glad you did, Uncle Ezra. Quiet, Grit, or I'll send you to the stable," for the dog was uttering low growls, and sidling closer and closer to the aged man, who still remained standing. It might be noticed that our hero did not say that he was glad to see his uncle. He was not,

and he did not believe in saying what was not so, even to be polite.

"Have you got that savage cur still?" demanded Mr. Larabee, while he bowed slightly in response to a salutation from Paul.

"I expect to have Grit for a long time yet," replied his nephew, coldly. "Though if he annoys you I'll have him taken away," and he pushed a button on the wall.

"He does annoy me! You know I can't abide dogs. Useless critters, eatin' almost as much as a man, all covered with fleas, and no good anyhow! Send him away!"

"Grit, I guess you'd better go," said Dick, softly, as a janitor came in response to his ring. "Take him to the stable, Hawkins. I'll have him back—later," he added in a low voice. Grit was led off, whining in protest as he looked at Dick, and then shifting his tones to a menacing growl as he glared at Uncle Ezra, who, he well knew, was the cause of his banishment.

"Ugly brute!" muttered Mr. Larabee. "I've been waiting quite some time for you, Nephew Richard," he went on. "I was afraid I'd have to go back without seeing you. I've got a limited excursion ticket, and if I didn't use it back to Dankville to-day I'd lose the value of it. Leastwise I might have to sue the railroad company to recover, and lawsuits is dreadful expensive—dreadful."

"We just went for a walk," Dick explained.

"I did not know exactly what time you would come."

"No, I couldn't tell, myself. But I got through my business sooner than I expected, even with attending to some after I got through with the deal that brought me on here."

"It came out all right, I hope," ventured Dick.

"Yes—oh, yes. My business allers does come out satisfactory—leastwise mostly." Perhaps Uncle Ezra was thinking of the time he had interfered with Dick's yachting trip, with disastrous results to himself.

"I got all that was coming to me," the aged man went on, "though I did have a fight for it."

"Did some one owe you money?" asked Dick.

"Well, yes, in a way. You see it was a young fellow who had been left more money than was good for him. He didn't know enough to take care of it, and now I've got it." Uncle Ezra chuckled grimly.

"I hope you didn't take all he had, Uncle Ezra." spoke Dick.

"Why shouldn't I?" Mr. Larabee asked, indignantly. "This chap didn't know the value of money—I do. He made certain investments, and I told him that I'd insist on having my last dollar if they failed. They did fail, just as I knew they would, and now I have his money. It was mine by right, though, for business is business, and he's young enough to start over again. It will do him good. Ha! Ha! I'll never

forget how blank he looked when he asked me if I wouldn't give him another chance. Another chance! Ho! Ho! He had his chance and didn't use it. Another chance! I guess not! I want what's mine!" And Uncle Ezra ground his teeth and clenched his bony fists in a way that was not pleasant to contemplate.

"Then you cleaned him out, Uncle Ezra?" asked Dick.

"Not I—no. He cleaned himself out by his foolish investments. You can't have your cake and eat it too, you know. You can't be a 'sport' and not pay attention to your business, and expect to keep your money. You've got to be on the watch all the while. I made a pretty penny out of it—er—that is, not too much!" Uncle Ezra added quickly, as if fearful lest some one should attempt to borrow something from him. "But a legitimate profit—yes, a legitimate profit.

"And, as I got through sooner than I expected, Nephew Richard, I came over to see you, as I promised. But I'll soon have to be getting back. I've got a new hired man, and I know he'll feed too much to the stock, and ruin 'em, to say nothing of wasting grain. I must get back before feeding time."

"I hope you'll stay and take lunch with me," suggested Dick, as he thought he saw a hungry look in his uncle's face.

"Yes, I might," was the answer, as though Mr. Larabee was doing Dick a favor.

"Then I'll send word to have a place laid for you at our table. You know some of my friends, I think."

"Humph! Yes, I do, and I can't say I altogether approve of 'em, Nephew Richard. They spend too much money."

"Well I guess they've got plenty to spend," said Dick, for Kentfield Academy was attended by the sons of many rich men, though it was in no sense a snobbish institution.

"Yes," went on Uncle Ezra, with a grim chuckle, "I came here to meet a young man, and I met him. I came to teach him a lesson, and I taught it. I guess Mr. Frank Wardell won't be so high and mighty after this. I cleaned him out—and it was all done in a regular way, too. I cleaned him out."

"Ruined him, you mean, Uncle Ezra?"

"Well, *he* accused me of that, but it wa'n't my fault. He brought it on himself, and he can start over again. He's young yet."

"But what will become of him, Uncle Ezra, if he hasn't any money?"

"I don't know, and he didn't either by the way he rushed off after I got through with him," and the old man chuckled. "But I reckon he can go to work like the rest of us. I offered him a place in my woolen mill at Dankville. I said I could pay him five dollars a week to start, though I know he wouldn't be wuth it. But he might learn the trade."

Dick said nothing, but the thought of a ruined man, who must have had a considerable fortune, going to work for Uncle Ezra in the woolen mill for five dollars a week, struck our hero as being rather pathetic.

"Did he take your offer, Mr. Larabee?" asked Paul.

"He did not!" exclaimed Dick's uncle. "He said he'd become a tramp first. Wa'al, he kin if he wants to—there's no law ag'in' it!" and again he chuckled mirthlessly.

"I'll go see about lunch," volunteered Dick. "Oh, something for me, Toots?" he exclaimed, as he opened the door, and saw an old Sergeant standing there with an envelope in his hand.

"Yes, a letter, Mr. Hamilton."

"It's from dad!" exclaimed our hero, as he noted the writing.

"I hope he has taken my advice, and will withdraw you from this useless military academy," spoke Uncle Ezra. "It is time you went to work, Nephew Richard."

"I'll be back in a little while," replied Dick, not taking the trouble to answer his uncle directly, and he hurried off down the corridor to arrange about having his guest at luncheon in the mess hall.

While preparations for the meal are under way I shall ask for a few minutes of your time—you my new readers—while I briefly explain about Dick Hamilton, and introduce you more

formally to him, as he has appeared in the previous volumes of this series.

Dick was the only son of Mortimer Hamilton, of Hamilton Corners, in New York State. Mr. Hamilton was a millionaire, with varied interests, and Dick had a fortune in his own right, left to him by his mother.

In my first book, called "Dick Hamilton's Fortune," I related how this inheritance came to the youth, and under what peculiar conditions, so that he really had to work hard to deserve it. And he nearly lost it at that. The second volume deals with Dick's life at a well-known military academy—Kentfield—and is entitled, "Dick Hamilton's Cadet Days." How he had to struggle against heavy odds, and how he won out, is related in the story.

In "Dick Hamilton's Steam Yacht," our hero found himself confronted with a queer problem. How he worked it out, and defeated the aims of Uncle Ezra, you will find fully set forth.

Uncle Ezra Larabee was a curious character. He was quite rich, perhaps not so much so as Mr. Hamilton, but with a large fortune. He did not seem to enjoy life, however, and was continually preaching economy. He had a particular aversion to the bulldog, Grit, and, it might be said in passing, Grit returned the compliment, so to speak.

When Dick and his chums at Kentfield found that their football challenge to the Blue Hill

Academy was treated as a joke, they were quite angry, and justly so. True, the former military academy team was in poor shape, but the lads were eager to do better.

And in "Dick Hamilton's Football Team," the fourth book of the series, I related how the young millionaire made a big change at Kentfield, and what came of it, and I also related how he was instrumental in helping his father in a business transaction.

The Fall and football were things of the past, and now the long summer vacation was approaching. Baseball had the call, and Dick was acting as the academy pitcher with great success. A few weeks more and Kentfield would close until Fall, and what to do in the interim was puzzling not only Dick, but some of his chums.

"Well, Uncle Ezra," said the cadet, as he came back into the room a little later, to find his chum Paul fidgeting about, for it was no joke to entertain Mr. Larabee, "I've arranged to have our lunch a little ahead of the rest. I know you want to catch your train."

"Yes, I do. I don't want to waste my return ticket. I'll go down at once."

Paul gave a sigh of relief, and winked at Dick. The three moved toward the dining hall, Dick making inquiries about his aunt, and some other distant relatives in Dankville, a place he hated above all others,—for his uncle's house there was almost the personification of gloom.

"Wa'al, your aunt's as well as she can expect to be," remarked Mr. Larabee. "She suffers consid'able from stomach misery, and the doctor don't seem to do her no good. He charges enough too, and he's allers changin' the medicine. I should think he could take one kind and stick to it."

"He has to try different kinds to see what is the best," suggested Dick.

"I know, but you ought to see the bottles, only half-took, that I have to throw away. I tried to git a rebate on 'em, but the druggist said he couldn't use 'em. So I'm that much out," and Mr. Larabee drew a deep sigh.

"Any news from home, Dick?" asked Paul, as the three sat alone in the mess hall, at a special table for visitors. "How is your father?"

"By Jove! I forgot to read the letter!" exclaimed Dick, pulling it from his pocket. "Excuse me while I look at it," and he ripped open the envelope.

CHAPTER III

GOOD NEWS

"WILL you have some more of this roast beef, Mr. Larabee?" asked Paul, doing the honors for Dick, who was busy over the letter from his father.

"Wa'al, I might have a bit more. It seems like pretty tender meat."

"Yes, we get the very best at Kentfield."

"Hum! If I was runnin' this place I'd buy the cheaper cuts, and save money. Tough meat is better for growing lads, anyhow. I wouldn't give 'em such expensive meat."

"But we pay for it, Mr. Larabee."

"It's a waste of money," replied the miser, and went on with the meal, which, to do Dick justice, was exceptionally good. Dick never believed in starving even his ill-natured relatives.

"Hurray! This is great!" suddenly exclaimed the young millionaire. "Whoop! Oh, I say, excuse me, Uncle Ezra!" he added, quickly. "I didn't mean to startle you," for the aged man had jumped at Dick's exclamation, and some potato, covered with gravy, had fallen on his trousers.

"That's jest like you boys—allers shoutin' and makin' a noise," rasped out Mr. Larabee. "I'll have to pay for havin' that spot taken out," and he scrubbed vigorously at it with a napkin. "That is, unless my hired man can start it with some of my harness soap. I guess I'll have him try when I get back. No use payin' a cleaner if my hired man can do it."

"I'm sorry, Uncle Ezra," spoke Dick, contritely, and trying not to smile at Paul Drew. "We can take it out here for you. A little ether will do the trick. It will dissolve the grease. I'll take you to the chemical laboratory after lunch."

"No, the ether might eat a hole in my pants, and they've my second best ones. I'll wait until I git hum, and try the harness soap. Next time please don't yell so."

"I won't, Uncle Ezra. But dad sent me some good news, and I just couldn't help it."

"Is he going to take you to Europe this vacation?" asked Paul.

"Europe! You don't mean to tell me that Mortimer Hamilton is going to waste money on another trip to Europe?" cried Mr. Larabee, in horror.

"No, it isn't that," answered Dick. "He writes that as he sees by my reports I have done well this term, I may have just what I've been wanting a long time."

"To go into some business, I hope," said Mr.

Larabee. "That would be a sensible present, and I could offer you a place in my woolen mill at a salary of——"

"No, thank you, Uncle Ezra," laughed Dick. "I think I'll stay here at Kentfield for another term yet."

"But what is it your father is going to give you?" asked Paul. "Don't keep us in suspense."

"It's a touring car!" cried Dick, in delight. "He says I can select the best and biggest car made, and send the bill to him. Hurray! Isn't that great news? Say, I can just about see where my vacation is coming in now, Paul."

"That's right. You are in luck!"

"A touring car!" cried Mr. Larabee. "You mean an automobile, Dick? Why you've got one already. It would be a shameful waste of money to buy another. You can take what a touring car would cost, and invest the sum in some good securities. I have some that I acquired from that young man I spoke of to-day."

"I haven't a touring car," said Dick. "I have that little runabout; but it isn't much use. A touring car for mine!"

"Oh, the sinful waste of this rising generation!" murmured Uncle Ezra, shaking his head, sadly.

"What kind of a car is he going to give you, Dick?" asked Paul.

"He says I can pick it out myself. I'll read

you that part of the letter," and Dick quoted from the missive:

"'I have been thinking of something you might like, Dick, as a sort of reward for your good work at school this winter. I know you have studied hard. I had a man come here to look over your runabout, thinking perhaps it could be fixed up, but he says it is hardly worth it. He advised trading it in for a new and up-to-date machine, and I think that best myself.

"'I want you to be satisfied with what I get you, and I think the best way would be to let you pick it out yourself. So if you will look over some catalogues, which you can send for yourself, and let me know the make of car, I will attend to the rest.'"

"That's great!" cried Paul.

"A terrible waste!" muttered Mr. Larabee. "Sinful!"

"Good old dad!" exclaimed Dick, as he put the letter in his pocket. "I wonder what sort of a car I ought to take?"

"One that you can cross the country in," advised Paul.

"That's what I'll do—I'll get a big touring car, and take some of you fellows with me. We'll have a great and glorious trip this summer!"

"More waste! You would much better get

work somewhere, Dick, and pay part of your expenses here," declared Mr. Larabee.

"My mother arranged all that before she died," said the young cadet. "She wanted me to attend a military school, and left the funds for it. My tuition is all paid for."

"Well, my sister never did know what she was doing," declared Mr. Larabee, bitterly.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Dick, hotly. "Remember that she was *my* mother," and he spoke the word softly, for she had not been dead many years.

"Ahem! Wa'al, I didn't mean anything," stammered Mr. Larabee. "Say, I've got to hustle to get my train," he added, quickly, looking at an ancient silver watch, which he pulled out of his pocket by means of a leather thong. "Come and see us at Dankville, Nephew Richard. Your aunt will be glad to have you, but you can't expect such meals as this," he went on hastily. "You know she has the dyspepsia, and she can't eat much, so I don't buy much. But come and see us."

Dick mumbled something not quite distinguishable, and the meal came to an end.

"I guess I'll just take some of this meat that's left over, and make myself a couple of sandwiches," said Mr. Larabee, suiting the action to the word. "No use in letting it go to waste," he added. "And I might get hungry before we get to Dankville. This will save me buying any-

thing on the train," and wrapping up the sandwiches in a piece of newspaper he thrust them into his pocket.

"Thank goodness I didn't take him to one of the tables with the fellows!" whispered Dick, as he winked at Paul. "He sure is the limit!"

"This way to the trolley that goes to the depot," said Dick, as he escorted his uncle across the parade ground, Paul having excused himself.

"I'm not going to take the trolley, Nephew Richard. I have plenty of time to walk the distance, and there is no use wasting five cents. It is grass most of the way, and I won't wear out my shoes none to speak of. I'm going to walk."

"All right," assented Dick, with a shrug of the shoulders. "Good-bye. I'd go with you, but we have guard mount soon, and I'm officer of the day."

"Foolishness, all foolishness!" snorted Mr. Larabee, feeling in his pocket to make sure he had the sandwiches. "You had better think twice about wasting money on that touring car, too, Nephew Richard. Don't take it—take the money and invest it."

"I would rather have the car, Uncle Ezra. Remember me to Aunt Samanthy."

"Um!" mumbled Mr. Larabee, as he walked off in the direction of the railroad. A trolley car was coming, and it was quite a distance to the station, but he did not signal for it to stop.

"He's happy," mused Dick. "He didn't have

to pay for his lunch, he got his supper for nothing, and he's saving a nickel carfare. Oh, he's happy all right. But, excuse me!"

Just then Grit, who had been released from his kennel near the stable, came rushing out to meet his master. Then the dog caught sight of the vanishing figure of Uncle Ezra, and with a growl sprang in that direction.

"Here! Come back, Grit!" yelled Dick. "Come back!"

The bulldog paused. Mr. Larabee looked back. The temptation was too much for the animal. He made another rush.

"Call him back! Call him back!" yelled Mr. Larabee, breaking into a run. "If he bites me, Nephew Richard, I'll sue your father for damages! Call him back!"

"Grit!" called the cadet, and the dog knew the consequences of disobeying that voice. Reluctantly he turned, but he sent menacing growls and barks in the direction of his traditional enemy. Mr. Larabee was still running as Dick turned back toward the parade ground, with Grit following reluctantly.

"Grit, have you no manners?" asked Dick, but he could not help smiling. The dog wagged his tail, as though answering that he had not, and was glad of it.

Dick turned to look after his uncle, who, casting occasional fearful glances back, was hurrying toward the station. And, as Dick looked, he

saw a man turn from a cross road, and meet his uncle.

The two stopped at the same time, and the stranger seemed to be questioning Mr. Larabee. If such was the case he got little satisfaction, for Dick's uncle could be seen to shake his head vigorously in disapproval, and then, with a gesture, to dismiss the other. The stranger hesitated a moment, and soon turned away.

"He looks just like the man Paul and I met on the railroad," mused Dick. "The one Paul said acted as if he was going to commit suicide. I wonder what he wanted of Uncle Ezra?"

But Dick was not to know that for some time.

CHAPTER IV

TO THE AUTO SHOW

"Come on now, Dick! Give him a teaser!"

"You know how to make him bite!"

"Two down! Only one more Dick, old man!"

The occasion was the last of a series of baseball games between the Kentfield Military Academy and the Blue Hill Cadets, a rival organization. It was for the championship of the league, which coveted honor lay between Kentfield and Blue Hill, with the chances in favor of the former.

Each nine had won a game in the final series of the best two out of three, and to-day would decide the matter.

"That's the stuff, Dick old man!"

"That's got him going!"

"Make him fan again!"

These cries greeted Dick's delivery of the ball to Lem Gordon, who was up for Blue Hill, for Lem had struck and missed.

"Only two more like that Dick!" called Paul Drew, "and we'll be all to the merry."

"Watch Lem poke it, though!" called Joe Bell,

the plucky little captain of the Blue Hill nine. "A home run, Lem, or a broken bat."

The lad at home plate nodded, and kept a close watch on Dick, who was winding up for another delivery.

"Two balls—one strike," Innis Beeby called. "Watch yourself, Dick."

Dick nodded comprehendingly. This was several days after the visit of Uncle Ezra Larabee, and the time had been devoted to getting the Kentfield team in shape for the final contest. It was an important one, for, as I have said, it would carry with it the championship of the Military League.

The game had run along with nothing remarkable to distinguish it, and was now at the beginning of the ninth inning. Blue Hill had six runs to Kentfield's seven, and if Dick could strike this last man out the game would be ended in favor of the Kentfield nine, since they would not play out their half of the ninth. Blue Hill had two out, but Lem Gordon, the cadet at the bat, was a doughty hitter. Had he gone in earlier in that inning there might have been a different story to tell.

"Strike two!" called the umpire, and a wave of cheering seemed to roll over the grandstand—cheers in which the shrill voices of girls could be heard.

"Oh, I do hope Dick strikes him out!" exclaimed Mabel Hanford, one of a party of pretty girls in the main stand. "Isn't he fine?"

"Who—Dick or Lem?" asked Nellie Fordice.

"Dick, of course, though Lem is very nice, and he's a dandy dancer."

"So is Dick," declared Nettie French. "Oh girls! are you going to the graduation ball?"

"If we're asked," answered Mildred Adams.

"Oh, let's watch the game," suggested Mabel, and the four girls, with whom Dick and his chums were on friendly terms, gave their attention to the contest.

The interest on the part of the big crowd present was now intense. The next ball might tell the tale, for if Dick struck out the batter, the game would end. On the other hand if Gordon got a safe hit, he would be followed by another good batsman, and the game might go at least another half inning, and in case Kentfield could not make a winning run, continue on for some time longer.

Dick felt a bit nervous as he got ready to deliver the next ball. It was two and two now.

"I've got to get it over the plate, and yet fool him," thought Dick. "I wonder if I dare risk a little slow twister. If he hits it, we're goners though—that is, we'll have to fight it out the rest of this inning. Well, here goes!"

As he was about to deliver the ball he heard the barking of Grit over in one of the grandstands, where a chum, who was not playing, was keeping the bulldog.

"Good old Grit!" mused Dick. "That's his way of cheering, I guess!"

Swiftly the ball left Dick's fingers, shooting toward the batter. Lem stepped back a trifle, and then lunged forward to meet the horsehide. And he did meet it with his bat, full and true.

With a vicious "ping!" the ball shot back, out over the diamond, shooting upward, and laying a course just between the left and centre fielders. Both players converged to meet it, but the ball passed over their heads, as they had to run back.

"Go on, Lem! Sprint for it!"

"Show 'em how you can run!"

"Leg it, old man! Leg it!"

"A home run! A home run!"

"We'll beat 'em yet! Go on! Go on!"

But Lem needed not the hoarse cries to urge him on. He needed not the frantic cheers of his comrades in arms nor those who sat in the grandstands. No sooner had he felt the magic of that meeting between his bat and the ball, than he sprang forward like some stone from an ancient catapult, tossing the stick to one side. And how he did run!

The second baseman stood ready to relay the ball home, as soon as the frantic rightfielder should get it. But the horsehide had rolled into the deep grass. There was some delay in finding it, and by that time Lem was at second. As

he rounded that the centrefielder got his fingers on the ball. Like a flash he threw.

"Come on! Come on!" screamed the Blue Hill captain, and Lem came.

He beat the ball to third base, and kept on. He heard the thud of the horsehide striking the mit of the third baseman, and thought all was lost, but he dared not turn to see. Then a groan —a groan of despair from the Kentfield stand— told him what had happened. The third baseman had muffed it. There was still a chance for the runner.

Lem's feet and legs scarce could carry him onward, but he forced them to. The shortstop was racing madly for the ball. He and Dick collided, and when the ball was finally recovered by the chagrined third baseman himself, Lem was so near home that it was a foregone conclusion that he would tally the tieing run.

And he did. The ball came with a "plunk" into the catcher's big mit, and then the umpire called out:

"Safe!"

Joyful pandemonium broke loose in the Blue Hill ranks.

"We've got a chance to beat 'em!" they yelled. And truly this was so, but it was a very slim chance.

"Never mind, Dick," consoled Beeby. "You can strike out Ed Mayfield."

"Don't let him get a look in, and we can easily

pull one run out when we get to the bat," urged Paul Drew.

"All right," answered Dick, shortly. He had taken a chance on Lem not hitting that ball, but the unexpected had happened. Dick pulled himself together, and faced Ed Mayfield, the next batter up, who was nervously dancing about the plate, trying by means of grins and gibes to disconcert the pitcher.

But Dick was not built that way. Calmly he sized up his opponent and sent in a ball that fooled him. Then came something in the nature of a fizzle, when the umpire called a ball. It began to look a bit dubious when the next was a ball also.

"Careful, Dick," warned the captain. "We can't afford to go to pieces now."

Dick did not answer, but there was a grim tightening of his lips. Then he sent in a viciously swift ball.

"Strike two!" called the umpire, sharply.

"Ah!" came as a sort of chorus from the big crowd.

"Dick's all right now," declared Paul Drew, in a low voice.

And so it proved. Without giving another ball, Dick put over another delivery, which resulted in a strike, and to it the umpire added:

"Strike three—batter's out!" The score was a tie.

"Now, Kentfield!" came the excited cry.

"Show 'em how to win this game! One run will do it!"

The home team came pouring in from the various parts of the diamond, ready to bat. Paul Drew was to start off, and managed to get to first. But he was caught stealing second. Then Teddy Naylor got to third, but was held there as Hal Foster struck out.

"Two down," came the mournful cry. It began to look as though the game would go ten innings, with the ever-increasing chance that Blue Hill would win, or at least improve her opportunity. The score was still a tie.

"Hamilton up!" called the scorer.

"Dick, you've just got to make a hit!"

"Bring in Naylor!" was implored.

"Knock the cover off, Dick!"

These were only a few of the cries that greeted our hero as he stepped to the plate. Ordinarily Dick was a good safe hitter, in contrast to many pitchers, but this time, when so much depended on his skill, he found himself feeling nervous.

"Here, this won't do!" he told himself. "Brace up. Think of that big touring car you're going to get and the fun you'll have. Think of Grit—and Uncle Ezra."

The memory of how the aged man had hurried away from Grit's threatened attack brought a smile to Dick's face. He could feel his nervousness leaving him, but he was brought to a realizing sense of the importance of paying more strict

attention to baseball, by hearing the umpire call sharply:

"Strike one!"

Dick had let the first ball pass him without making a motion toward it, though it was just where he wanted it.

"Watch yourself," called Paul Drew, in a low voice.

Dick saw that he must. He looked narrowly at the pitcher and, from previous experience, he thought he knew what kind of a ball was coming.

"I'm going to hit it!" said Dick fiercely to himself.

He stepped right into it, before the curve had time to "break," and when he felt the impact of his bat on the horsehide he knew that he had made a hit.

"It's good for two bags anyhow!" he murmured as he sprinted toward first, and had a vision of Naylor racing in from third.

"Go on Dick! Go on!"

"Run! Run old man!"

"A homer—a homer!"

"And a homer it's going to be!" cried Dick, as he passed second, and saw the right fielder vainly racing after the ball which had been sent away over his head and back of him. It was a better hit than that of Gordon.

Dick saw Naylor cross the home plate and then he was at third himself. The ball was slowly coming in from the fielder, but the throw was

such a long one that the second baseman had to run out to meet it.

"They'll never get it home in time," thought Dick, as he staggered onward, for he had run hard and his legs were trembling. "I can beat it home."

And he did, crossing the rubber before the ball was in the catcher's hands.

Then such cheering as broke out. Naylor's run had put Kentfield one ahead, and Dick's made two. It was sensational playing, with two home runs so close together, and the crowd appreciated it. Kentfield had the championship now.

"Kentfield! Kentfield! Kentfield!
Rah! Rah! Rah!
Boom! Boom! *Boom!*
Ah! Ah! Ah!
Kentfield!"

Thus the school cry was given, coming from a thousand hoarse throats, and then came:

"Three cheers for Dick Hamilton!"

The grandstands rocked and swayed and creaked with the stress of emotion displayed.

"It was great, old man! Great!" cried Paul, clapping his panting chum on the back.

"Thanks. I knew I had to do it to save the game."

"And you did!" exclaimed Beeby. "Somebody punch me—I'm too happy to last!"

Some one obliged him with such force that Beebly stumbled, and to save himself he had to

execute a forward somersault, at which trick he was an adept.

"Armstrong up!" called the scorer, when he could make himself heard.

"Oh, what's the use of playing it out?" asked Beeby.

"Let's sweeten the score if we can," urged Dick, who did not like doing anything by halves. But there was little interest in the game now, for Kentfield had won, and nothing could take it from her. Still Armstrong got up, and promptly fanned out, over which fact there was no regret, rather gladness on the part of the champions, who wanted to quit and celebrate.

Dejectedly Blue Hill filed off the field, after they had cheered and been cheered. The great game was over, the crowds thronged down from the grandstands. The Kentfield nine and the substitutes got together, and cheered Dick to the echo. Then with a singing of the song that always followed a victory they dispersed to the dressing rooms. Their baseball season was over.

"You certainly did yourself and us proud, Dick," said Paul, as he and his chum walked away together. "I wish Uncle Ezra could have seen you."

"Oh, he'd probably say that the money spent on baseball might better be used to buy interest-bearing bonds," laughed Dick. "But say, I thought I saw some of the girls here."

"They are. We'll look 'em up after we tidy up a bit."

And then came the shower baths, a changing into clean raiment and a gladsome time with the girls, who crowded around the hero of the day.

"Well, I suppose we'll soon be away from here," remarked Paul that night as he, Dick and Innis Beeby sat in the room of the latter, and talked over the great game.

"Yes, my folks wrote to say that the cottage by the sea was open, and I'm expected there soon," said Innis.

"I'm booked for the White Mountains this trip," said Paul, "and I'm not very keen for it, either."

Dick was silent for a few seconds, looking over some papers.

"What are you going to do, old man?" asked Paul.

"Fellows, I've got the best scheme yet!" exclaimed Dick. "I've just got it worked out. What do you say to a trip to California with me in the new auto I'm going to get? Will you come?"

"Will we!" cried Innis without a moment's hesitation. "Will a duck swim?"

"Put her there, old man!" yelled Paul, slapping his hand into that of Dick. "When do we start?"

"Do you mean it?" asked Dick, hardly be-

lieving his chums were in earnest. They assured him that they did.

"Then here's my game," he went on. "Dad wrote to me to get some catalogues and pick out the auto I wanted. I'm going to go him one better."

"What's that?" asked Paul. "Have a car made to order?"

"No, that would take too long. But the New York Automobile Show is on, in Madison Square Garden. There are lots of cars there that can be bought for immediate delivery. And I can pick out a car twice as good from seeing it, rather than by looking at a picture of it.

"Now we three will take in that auto show. I'll pick out the car I want, dad will foot the bill, according to his promise, and we'll start on our tour across country. How does that strike you?"

"Great!" declared Innis.

"Bully!" assented Paul. "Dick, you're a gentleman and a scholar. This is too much!" and he pretended to weep on Beeby's shoulder.

"Then pack up, and we'll leave day after to-morrow for New York," said Dick. "I'll write to dad. I'd go to-morrow only I don't want to miss the graduation dance."

"No, and I fancy someone else doesn't either," said Paul, with a significant glance at the picture of a pretty girl on the bureau.

So it was arranged. The dance was a success,

as all such affairs at Kentfield were, but we shall not concern ourselves with that. The day after it saw Dick and his chums, with Grit, on the way to the big auto show in New York.

CHAPTER V

THE BIG CAR

"WHAT kind of a car have you in mind, Dick?"

"Get a six cylinder, anyhow."

Dick Hamilton looked at Paul and Innis, who were in the parlor car with him, speeding on to New York.

"I haven't exactly made up my mind," answered the young millionaire. "I want a powerful car; if we're going to cross the Rockies I'll need power. But I want a comfortable one, too. It wants to be enclosed, and so arranged that if we have to we can sleep in it."

"Say, you want a traveling hotel; don't you?" asked Paul.

"Something like that, yes," assented Dick. "But I don't want such a heavy machine that we'll be having tire trouble all the time. I'm not going to make up my mind as to any particular car until I see what kinds there are in the Garden."

The boys talked of many things as the train sped on. Dick had engaged rooms for himself and his friends at the hotel where he and his father always stopped on coming to the metropo-

lis, and a few hours more would see them at their destination.

The porter came up to Dick, his honest black and shining face wearing a broad grin, as he remarked:

"'Scuse me, but does one ob yo' gen'mans own a bulldog what is in de baggage car?"

"I do!" exclaimed Dick, quickly. "What about him?"

"Den yo' presence am earnestly requested up dere by de baggageman," went on the porter.

"Is Grit hurt?" demanded the young millionaire.

"No, sah, leastaways he wasn't when I seed him. He were feelin' mighty peart!"

"Then what's the trouble?" asked Dick, as he prepared to follow the colored man to the car ahead.

"Why dere's a man in de car, an' yo' dog won't let him go out."

"Won't let him go out?" asked Dick, wonderingly.

"No, sah! He jest completely won't let him go out ob dat car, and he's keepin' him right by de do, so de baggage man can't slide out no trunks, no how. An' we's comin' to a station soon, where dem trunks hab jest natchally gotter be put off."

'I'll see what's the matter," promised Dick, hurrying on. "Be back in a minute," he called to his chums.

"If you want any help, send for us!" suggested Paul, "though," he added in a lower voice, "if Grit is on a rampage I'd rather not interfere —that is, personally."

Dick found matters as the porter had described. A rather flashily dressed young man stood close against one of the side doors of the baggage car, while Grit, who had broken his chain, stood in front of him, with his bowed front legs far apart, and his black lips drawn back from his teeth. From time to time the bulldog growled menacingly, especially whenever the young man moved. The baggageman, with a puzzled expression on his face, had placed some trunks in the middle of the car, ready to be put out of the side door when the next station stop should be reached.

"But every time I try to get out of the way," said the flashily dressed man, "this confounded dog of yours acts as if he was going to eat me up. I daren't move. Call him off or I'll kick him, and break his jaw."

"I wouldn't," said Dick, quietly. "It would probably be your last kick—with that foot, anyhow."

"Something has to be done," declared the baggage man. "I must put these trunks off soon. That door's on the station side, and the other door opens against a high concrete wall. I can't get a trunk off there."

"I'll take care of Grit," said Dick. "What

did you do to him?" he asked the young fellow.

"Nothing."

"Oh, yes you did," said Dick, quietly. "Grit doesn't act that way for nothing. Come here," he called, and the dog obeyed, though with fierce backward glances at the man by the door. "Now you can move," went on Dick. "What did they do to you, old fellow?" he asked, as he bent over his pet. Grit's neck was bleeding slightly where his collar had cut him as he wrenched against the chain, and broke it.

"He pulled his tail—that's what he did," asserted the now relieved baggageman. "I told him to let the dog alone, for I saw it was a thoroughbred, and was nervous. But he got funny with the animal, and then your dog broke loose, and drove him against the door."

"You're lucky he didn't bite you," said Dick, as he loosened the chafing collar. "He only wanted to teach you a lesson, I guess. Next time don't fool with a bulldog."

"If he'd a' bit me I'd a' had the law on you," threatened the young man, as he hurried out of the car, followed by the resentful glare of Grit.

"All right," assented Dick. "Only I guess you might have had to wait until you came out of the hospital. It was your own fault. Will he be all right with you?" he asked of the baggage man, referring to Grit.

"Oh, yes, he and I are good friends. I was in another part of the car, making out some

records, or I'd have stopped that young idiot from pinching his tail. But he got all that was coming to him. He was mighty scared. I thought it best to send for you, though."

"That was right. Grit, old man, I can't blame you, but try and hold yourself in," said Dick, patting his pet.

The dog whined, and licked his master's hands, and then, having made sure that Grit and the baggageman would get along well together, Dick left his pet, having brought him some water, and bound up the cut on his neck with a spare handkerchief.

Grit whined lonesomely as Dick left, and the young millionaire called back:

"It'll only be a little while now, old fellow. We'll soon be at the hotel."

Grit's joy was unbounded when he was released from the car, and soon with his master, and the latter's two chums, was speeding across New York in a taxicab. Arrangements were made at the hotel to have Grit cared for, and he was to be allowed in Dick's room at certain times during the day, the young millionaire having ascertained that no nervous old ladies were near enough to be annoyed.

"And now for the auto show!" exclaimed Dick after dinner that night. "We'll make a preliminary survey, and see what we can find."

Madison Square Garden was a brilliant place, with the thousands of electric lights, the glitter-

ing cars and the decorative scheme, which was unusually elaborate that year.

"Say, this is great!" gasped Beeby, as the three entered through the crowd at the doors.

"I should say yes!" added Paul. "It's gorgeous! How are you going to pick out a car among so many, Dick?"

"Oh, there's only one kind I want. I hope I find it here. But there's no hurry. Let's look about."

And indeed the sights were well worth viewing. There seemed to be every kind of car represented, from little runabouts to palatial enclosed vehicles that would carry eight persons. And there were trucks, from small three-wheeled ones, that could be used to deliver a lady's hat, to monsters that could shift a five-ton safe with ease.

There was the hum of motors, electricity driven, for gasoline was not allowed in the building on account of the fire danger. There was the snapping of spark-plugs, some of which were being shown at work under water, to prove how hard it was to short circuit them. And there was the crackle of a wireless outfit in use, to demonstrate how it could be attached to an army-auto in war time.

The boys roved about the big space, visiting exhibit after exhibit. Several times Dick thought he saw what he wanted, but he always decided to look further, in the hope of finding something a little better.

As he and his chums passed a place where they had lingered long over some beautiful enclosed cars, powerful and efficient with many new appliances, Dick's eye was caught by a big car standing by itself in an open space. It was painted dark green, and for a moment its size almost made Dick believe it was a sort of dummy, used for advertisement purposes.

Then, as he saw the heavily tired wheels and caught a glimpse of the engine under the open hood, he exclaimed:

"That's the car for me, boys!"

The three crowded closer to the big auto, and their wonder grew as they noted how it was fitted out.

CHAPTER VI

THE RUINED MILLIONAIRE

"WHAT a car!"

"It's got folding bunks in, as sure as you're born!"

"And that looks like a small kitchen!"

"Those tires are a new kind, too—cushion instead of pneumatic!"

"Say, you could drive that through a hail storm and you'd never know it!"

"That's the car for me, boys, if dad will stand for it, and I can get it!" Thus exclaimed Dick Hamilton, the other exclamations coming from his two chums as they stood admiring the big car.

Nor were they the only ones, for a throng had gathered about the space where the peculiar auto was being exhibited. In general shape it was like any large enclosed car, but it exceeded in size any Dick had ever seen. And in the interior appointments, certainly it was the "last word" in auto construction.

Briefly described, for I shall go more into details later, it was a six-cylinder machine, with the whole body back of the engine itself enclosed in

wood and glass. There was no division back of the steering wheel, the whole interior of the car, save for a space that Paul described as the "kitchen," being thrown into one compartment. And that apartment contained, as Beeby had said, folding bunks or berths, that served as long seats in the day time, while at night they made comfortable beds.

There was a small stove, evidently operated by an electric current; there were electric lights, and the car could be started by the same agency, as Dick noted. Then there were displayed dishes with which to set a folding table, and utensils for cooking on the electric stove. There was ample room for food and bed clothing, as well as for garments.

"That's the nearest thing to a traveling parlor and dining car that I've seen!" exclaimed Dick; "with sleeping berths thrown in. That's the car I want. I wonder if it's for sale, boys?" and he looked questioningly at a man who seemed to be in charge.

"Yes, it is," was the answer. "It has just been put on the market. In fact the car has been on exhibition only since this morning, when we got instructions to dispose of it."

"Do you make those up for stock?" asked Paul.

"No, this is the only car like it in the world, we believe. It was made to order for a gentleman, but now he does not want it, and he au-

thorized us to dispose of it for him. It has never been used, though it has been thoroughly tested."

"What's the matter?" asked Dick. "Didn't he like it?"

"Maybe it wasn't big enough," suggested Beeby.

"As to that I can't say," went on the salesman. "I only was told to dispose of it, and I'm afraid I'm going to have my own troubles. It's too large for use in the city. It was built for touring purposes exclusively, and it is very complete. But few persons would want a car like it, I am afraid. Would you like to look it over more closely?" he asked, seeing how interested Dick and his chums were.

"We sure would!" exclaimed Paul.

"And if dad doesn't keep his word, and get this for me," added Dick, "why—I'll get it myself. This car positively must be mine!"

"I'm afraid it will be more than the average young man can afford," remarked the agent, with a smile.

"The beauty of it, though," said Paul to the man in a low voice, as they slipped under the ropes, "is that he isn't an average young man."

"No?"

"That's Mortimer Hamilton's son," went on Paul.

"The millionaire?"

Paul nodded.

"Great Scott!" whispered the man. "I came

near making a break," and he hurried after Dick to explain the points of the car.

While Dick, his chums and others in the interested crowd looked on, the agent showed how the bunks could be utilized as seats in the day time, or even folded up out of the way and camp stools used when it was desired to eat. The table was let down from the "ceiling" and could be folded and raised with but little effort when not wanted.

There were enough dishes to feed six persons at a time, though four was all the car would "sleep." More could travel in it during the day, however. The electric stove, operated by a current from a dynamo, as well as from a storage battery, was very efficient, and a fairly complete meal could be cooked on it. There was also ample storage room for supplies.

The engine, in which Dick was also greatly interested, was of a new and very powerful type. It was almost "trouble-proof," and would stand up well under hard usage.

The use of a new type of cushion tires, instead of those inflated with air, insured freedom from punctures and blowouts, and would, because of the weight of the car, and a new kind of springs, make riding very easy.

"In short, it's a car for a long tour," said the agent.

"And it's the car for me!" exclaimed Dick. By this time most of the crowd had gone to

look at other exhibits, leaving the agent and the three boys comparatively alone. "But why did not the man who ordered it take it after it was completed?" asked Dick. "Was he dissatisfied with it?"

"Not at all!" exclaimed a voice back of the boys. "I couldn't take the car after I ordered it, for the simple reason that I didn't have the money to pay for it. I lost my fortune between the time I contracted for the *Last Word* and the time it was finished. That's all."

"Oh," said Dick blankly. He was rather surprised to be taken up so quickly. He turned to see who had spoken, and, as he did so, he uttered an exclamation of surprise that was echoed by Paul Drew.

For, standing near the big car which he could not now possess, was the young man whom Paul and Dick had seen acting so strangely on the railroad tracks—the young man who, according to Paul, had been prevented from committing suicide by Dick's prompt action.

The stranger, too, was as much surprised as were Dick and Paul. He paused as he was about to continue his explanation, and an odd look came over his face. Then he held out his hand, saying:

"I believe I have met two of you boys before."

"That's right," agreed Dick. "I'm glad to see you again. So this is your car?"

"It *was*," he replied with a little smile. "Now

it's for whoever can raise the money. I can't."

"I came on from Kentfield," Dick explained. "The academy has closed for the summer, and I'm looking for a touring car. My father is giving me one as a sort of reward for not flunking in class."

"I see. Well, you couldn't get a better car than this. I know the firm well, and, while it is rather peculiarly built, from ideas of my own, still it can compete with any of the regular machines, and beat most of them, though it has not abnormal speed, of course."

"I'm not looking for speed," laughed Dick. "I want comfort."

"It's rather odd that we should meet again," went on the young man. "I live out near Kentfield, but I thought I would take a run in to New York, to see if there was a chance of getting rid of the car. I haven't paid for it yet, but I believe I am, in a way, responsible, since I agreed to take it. I wouldn't like to see the firm lose money on it, but if it comes to getting it out of me they'll have hard work. I'm dead broke—cleaned out.

"Three months ago I was worth over a million. Now I have barely enough to live on. But I'm going to make my pile again!" he exclaimed with energy. "I'm not going to give up, and when I come into my own again I'll have another car like this. I've been foolish once, but I'm through now. They don't catch me twice on the

same bait. No more speculation for Frank Wardell!" and he slapped the big tire of one of the wheels determinedly.

Dick Hamitlon started.

"What—what did you say your name was?" he asked.

"Wardell—Frank Wardell. I'll give you a card," and he produced one.

"Mine's Hamilton—Dick Hamilton," said Dick.

"Glad to meet you. I know your father slightly—Mortimer Hamilton?"

"Yes."

"This is odd, a ruined millionaire and a successful one," and he laughed grimly. "Never mind, I'll be in your class soon again," and he shook hands with Dick, who had introduced his chums.

"Wardell—Frank Wardell," murmured Dick to Paul. "Do you recognize that name?"

"I can't say that I do. Why?"

"Don't ask me now. I'll tell you later. To think it should come out this way," went on Dick. "Frank Wardell! The man I met on the track—a ruined millionaire. No wonder he acted so strangely. Oh, if I could only help him! I hope he doesn't ask too much about my family. I'd hate to have to admit that I'm Uncle Ezra's nephew," and with this rather mystifying ejaculation, Dick gave his attention to what Mr. Wardell was saying—explaining some points

about the car that had escaped the attention of the boys.

"I do hope you will take it, Mr. Hamilton," the ruined millionaire went on. "I don't know of anyone I'd rather would get it than you. I know you'll appreciate it."

"I think very likely I shall take it," said Dick.

"Then you'll take a load off my shoulders," the other went on, "for I feel, in a measure, responsible for the price, and the land knows I could never raise the cash."

And Dick, as he looked over the wonderful touring car, could not help thinking how strangely fate had ordered matters. Paul looked at his chum, anxious to hear why the name "Wardell" should make such an impression on the young millionaire.

CHAPTER VII

ON THE ROAD

"THEN you have fully made up your mind to take it, Mr. Hamilton?" asked the agent, of Dick.

"Yes, it is just what I want. I will wire my father to-night, and I'm sure he will agree, though the price may be more than he first decided on. But I'll make up the difference myself."

"Then I'll let Mr. Wardell know," for the former millionaire, after declining an invitation to come to supper with Dick and his chums, had left the auto show.

"Say, what about him?" asked Paul, when he got a chance. "Who is this Wardell, anyhow?"

"Don't you remember," answered Dick. "That's the man Uncle Ezra came on from Dankville to see—to clean up, in other words—take his money away, you know. Don't you remember, Paul, hearing him tell about how a certain party didn't know enough to hold on to his wealth, and all that?"

"Is this the man—this Wardell?"

"The very same one, I believe. He must be. It couldn't be that there were two of the same

name, both of whom had lost their fortunes at the same time. Uncle Ezra ruined the man whose auto I'm going to take, Paul."

"Well, I guess you're right, Dick. It's a strange coincidence. Are you going to tell him it was your uncle who got all his money away from him?"

"I certainly am not, Paul. It's not a thing to be proud of, and if I keep him from finding it out until we get this car, and leave, I'll be glad of it. Of course if he asks me I'll have to tell him. But I don't believe he will. Larabee and Hamilton are different names, and Mr. Wardell will not be likely to trace any connection, though he may.

"I thought sure you'd let out something about Uncle Ezra when you heard the name Wardell, Paul."

"No, it didn't strike me. But then you know I wasn't in the room all the while you and your uncle were talking. I don't recall hearing him mention Wardell at all."

"Well, I did, and I was startled when I found out who this man was," went on Dick. "I suppose it's a sort of puzzle to you, Innis," the young millionaire added, while the auto salesman was making out some papers for Dick to sign.

"Somewhat, yes," admitted Beeby, and then Dick and his other chum explained.

"Well, I know one thing I didn't know be-

fore," said Paul, as they were ready to depart.

"What's that?"

"I know why this young Mr. Wardell was thinking of ending his life on the railroad track that day you saved him."

"Why was he?"

"Because he'd lost his fortune," went on Paul in a low voice. "Just think of it—a millionaire one week, and practically without a cent the next! I suppose that's the way it sometimes goes with rich men who make their living by speculation, but it's hard, just the same. And to know he couldn't pay for this fine car he'd ordered—no wonder he was tired of life."

"And to think that some member of my family was responsible," added Dick. "It makes me mad! I hope he doesn't connect me with Uncle Ezra."

"Do you suppose your uncle took advantage of him?" asked Innis. "I don't mean exactly that, either," he added hastily, thinking Dick might take the question as a reflection on his relative.

"Oh, you can't fuss me—saying things about Uncle Ezra," laughed the young millionaire. "While I don't believe he would do anything that was unlawful—that is, as *he* regards the law—I do think that he'd want every last cent that he could claim by any stretch of the statutes. He's a hard man, Uncle Ezra is, especially where money is concerned. I don't just know what

sort of dealings he had with this Mr. Wardell, but he got his fortune, that's sure, and maybe by a trick, for all I know.

"That's why I'm not at all anxious to have it known that I'm Mr. Larabee's nephew. I'm not at all proud of the connection, and I certainly would feel bad to have Mr. Wardell know it. Legally Uncle Ezra might be well within his rights, but morally I wouldn't be surprised if he was a good way outside of them. But let's forget all about such an unpleasant matter. I'll see when we can get this car, and try it."

A talk with the agent brought out the fact that Dick could take the big auto at any time after the money had been paid down. It was not a part of the regular auto show, and the space it occupied could be utilized by other machines.

"Very well then," said Dick. "I'll probably hear from my father in the morning. He'll likely send an order to his New York bankers to pay over the money, and then the machine will be mine."

"And I congratulate you," said the agent. "It is a car to be proud of, and if you intend making a long trip it will be just what you want."

"We'll go across the continent in her!" cried Dick. "Boys, are you with me?"

"That's what!" exclaimed Paul and Innis.

They spent some more time in looking at the various exhibits, and Dick sent his father a mes-

sage from the telegraph office temporarily set up in the Garden. Then they drifted back to the big car, which Dick had christened *Last Word,* on learning that Mr. Wardell had tentatively selected that title.

"It sure is a peach!" exclaimed our hero.

"Think you can drive it?" asked Paul.

"One of the company's engineers will be glad to demonstrate it on the road for you," suggested the agent.

"Thanks," replied Dick. "I think I shall be glad to have a few lessons. I can drive an ordinary car, but this is an extraordinary one."

Dick's anticipation of his father's action was confirmed next morning. A telegram came, saying:

"Congratulations. Big car—big price. I'm satisfied if you are."

"That's like dad," remarked Dick.

"But he doesn't say anything about the money," remarked Paul, who was anxious to have a ride in the big machine.

"Oh, trust dad not to overlook that part," spoke the young millionaire. "We'll go see that agent. Probably he has already heard from my father."

And so it proved. Dick's purchase of the car was confirmed in a telegram to the makers, and the information was added that Mr. Hamilton's

bankers had been instructed to send a certified check for the price.

"I have sent for one of our engineers," the salesman told Dick, when the latter and his two chums visited the Garden after breakfast. "You can go for a spin on the road this afternoon."

"Good!" cried Dick. "Get ready, fellows!"

Matters went through without a hitch. The price was paid over, and the car formally became Dick's. Then the professional chauffeur arrived, and after some manipulation the big touring machine was run out of the Garden, while a crowd gathered around to see the novel sight.

"It looks almost as big as a Pullman coach," declared Innis Beeby.

"Well, let's get in and see if it rides like one," suggested Dick.

"Look at the auto swells!" cried a newsboy. "Hurray!"

"As long as our heads aren't swelled we're all right," remarked Paul.

The oil and gasoline tanks had been filled, and, after looking over the various parts, the chauffeur got in, taking the driver's seat, the boys disposing themselves comfortably on the long, leather-covered benches, that would later be made into sleeping berths.

"Isn't he going to crank up?" asked Innis in some surprise, for the motor was not running when the chauffeur took his place.

"You don't have to, on this car," the man explained. "It is a self-starter. It has two systems—an electric motor, operated by an accumulated current, that will turn over the engine, and even run the car on its own power for some distance. Then there is also an acetylene gas motor, so in case one fails the other will work. I'll start it by electricity now."

He pressed a button on the dash. There was a low humming from somewhere beneath the car, and then the gasoline motor took up the song of progress. The machine vibrated with the power of the engine, until the driver slowed it down. Then throwing in the gear, he let the clutch slip into place, and the big machine glided slowly forward.

"We're off!" cried Dick.

"Like a charm!" added Paul. "I never saw a big car start so easily."

"This machine has a new style of clutch," explained the chauffeur. "You'll find a number of the very latest wrinkles on her," he added with a smile. "Now, where do you want to go?"

"Out toward the Bronx," replied Dick. "Get us into something like the country—that is, as much as there is near New York," and soon they were spinning ahead at good speed. It did not take them long to get in the upper part of Manhattan, and a little later they were out on what might be called a country road.

"This is great!" exclaimed Dick, as he gazed

from the plate glass windows of his touring car on the landscape that fairly flew past.

"It sure is!" agreed his chums.

"But wait until we start across the continent," went on the young millionaire. "Then we'll have some real fun!"

CHAPTER VIII

UNCLE EZRA LAUGHS

"SUPPOSE you try it now, Mr. Hamilton," suggested the chauffeur, when they had gone several miles, the professional giving the new owner various instructions about the car.

"Yes, go ahead, Dick," urged Paul. "The sooner you get to know how to run it, the quicker we'll be off on our trip."

"Well, I want you fellows to pick up some of the fine points, too," said Dick. "I don't intend to run the car all the while."

"Oh, we'll do our share," agreed Innis. "Sit up now, Dick and show us what you can do."

It was not without a feeling of nervousness that Dick took the wheel, for certainly driving this big and powerful car was no light matter.

But they were on a broad and straight highway, where there was not much traffic, so Dick took his place at the wheel and levers, with the chauffeur near by in case of emergency, and Paul and Innis looking on, as anxious to learn as was Dick.

"She steers easier than I thought she would," remarked the wealthy youth, when he had driven for a mile or so.

"Yes, and that's one danger," the chauffeur explained. "You're likely to give too much of a twist. Just a little turn of the wheel answers."

"Look out for that dog, Dick!" yelled Paul, as a yellow cur shot from a yard, diagonally across the road, barking at the big car.

"I see him!" came the answer.

"And there's a goose on the other side!" added Innis, as Dick swerved the machine to one side. "There, you ran over it's foot!"

A series of "honks-honks!" apprised the young driver that something had happened. Quickly he shut off the power and jammed on the foot and hand brakes. A woman rushed out of a rather dilapidated house crying:

"Oh, you've run over Heinie! You've run over Heinie! Oh, you've killed him!"

Dick turned pale.

"Is—is any one under the car?" he faltered.

"My Heinie! Oh, my Heinie!" cried the woman again. "You haf runned ofer my Heinie!"

With a bound Dick was out of the car through the sliding door in front, and peering between the wheels. He could see no child, and gave a sigh of relief.

"Who is Heinie?" he asked the woman.

"Who is Heinie? He is my best goose, and you haf runned over him mit your steam roller. You shall pay mit him yet!"

"Oh, if it's only a goose that's all right," said

Dick as he took out his pocketbook. "How much?"

"Heinie was worth more as a dollar," she exclaimed, as she picked up the goose, which was still protestingly honking. "His feets is broken. He was worth more as two dollar."

"Here are five," said Dick, generously. "I couldn't help it. I steered out to avoid the dog, and your goose got in the way. I thought it was a child, by the way you called."

"Heinie is more as a child by me. I haf him more as five years now, and always—always he is careful mit der autos. But yours! it is not a auto—it is a house!"

"Well, maybe he'll get better. His foot isn't much hurt," said Dick with a laugh, as he passed over the money. "I'm sorry."

"Poor Heinie," murmured the woman, as she gathered her apron about the goose and went into the house. "He was worth more as fife dollar!"

"You're starting in great, Dick," laughed Paul, as his chum got back into the touring car. "At this rate you'll need to take a big pocketbook along every time you go out."

"He aimed at the dog and hit a goose," added Innis.

"Lucky it was no worse," said Dick. "I sure thought I was in bad by the way she yelled about 'Heinie.'"

"You don't yet quite appreciate how easily

the car steers, I guess," suggested the chauffeur. "Try it some more."

They went on a little more slowly, and had no more accidents. Dick soon became familiar with the mechanism, and rapidly acquired confidence in himself. Then Paul and Innis took turns, under the watchful eye and ready hands of the chauffeur.

They stopped for dinner at a wayside hotel, and then drove back to New York, Dick arranging to have the car kept in a nearby garage. The next day he went out again, on a longer run, taking Grit with him. The bulldog seemed to take kindly to the new car, and made himself at home in it. The chauffeur had it easier now, for Dick felt confident enough to do all the operating himself.

"We ought to stock up and live in it one night," suggested Paul, the third day.

"Time enough for that," replied the delighted owner of the *Last Word*. "I'm going to drive it to Hamilton Corners in a few days."

"You are?"

"Sure. That won't be much of a run, compared with our trip across the continent."

Another week saw Dick so improved in skill that the chauffeur declared he need have no hesitation in taking the car on any trip. Then a license having been procured, and the tanks refilled, Dick and his chums started on the trip to Hamilton Corners. It was accomplished with-

out accident, an early morning start enabling them to arrive shortly before dark.

As they drove into the side entrance of Dick's house a voice called from the library:

"What's this, Mortimer? It looks like a railroad coach coming in."

"Uncle Ezra's here!" exclaimed the son of the house as he recognized the tones.

"I expect that is Dick's new touring car," replied Mr. Hamilton.

"Mortimer! You don't mean to say you let your son get an expensive auto like that?"

"I gave it to him, yes, Ezra," the boys heard Mr. Hamilton reply.

"Well, of all the sinful, foolish wasting of money, this is the worst! Why, such a car as that must have cost nigh onto a thousand dollars!"

"If he only knew!" murmured Dick, with a chuckle. "Come on in, fellows. You'll stay with me a few days, and then we'll arrange about our trip."

"Well, Nephew Richard, I see you haven't learned economy yet," rasped Uncle Ezra, as our hero entered the library with his chums. "Where do you expect to end your days?"

"I hope I don't have to think of that so soon, Uncle Ezra," replied Dick. "I guess you know my two chums; don't you?"

"Um! Is that dog in here?" the crabbed man asked quickly, as a low growl sounded from

under a chair near the door. "Send him out at once, or I shall go."

"Take Grit away, Gibbs," Dick said to the butler. "He and Uncle Ezra seem to get on each other's nerves," he added in a low voice.

Dick briefly related the incidents of his trip, and thanked his father for the generous gift of the car. Then, as the young men were rather dusty and tired from their journey, they went to their rooms to dress for dinner, which would soon be served.

Dick was ready first, and going downstairs he heard his father and uncle talking in the library. As he went toward the handsome room, intending to join them, he heard Mr. Hamilton remark:

"So you got possession of all his securities, Ezra?"

"Every one, Mortimer. I cleaned young Wardell out from head to foot, and it was all his own fault. He put up the stock as collateral for a loan. I supplied the money, and when the time came to pay me back he couldn't—he didn't have the cash."

"Because he bought some other stock that you controlled, and you so manipulated that market that the latter stock was worthless; wasn't that it, Ezra?" and Mr. Hamilton spoke coldly.

"Well, Mortimer, I didn't do nothin' unlawful; did I? I only did what other folks do every day. I had a right to swing my own market the way I liked; didn't I?"

"I suppose so."

"And if this Wardell didn't know enough to protect himself, that wasn't my fault; was it?"

"Perhaps not."

"He ought to have more sense."

"Perhaps. Still I feel sorry for him."

"Wa'al, I don't! He brought it on himself. Ha! ha! I won't forget how he begged me to hold off, and not close him out! Ha! ha!" and Uncle Ezra laughed heartily, in a sort of rasping chuckle. "I told him I wasn't no philanthropist, and he went away mighty mad, I reckon.

"But I'm not in business for my health. The funny part of it is, Mortimer, that even now, if Wardell only knowed enough, he could get back his fortune?"

"He could? How?" asked Mr. Hamilton, eagerly.

"Wa'al, I wouldn't tell everybody, but I know it will be safe with you. You see, when he got that big loan off me, to do what he calls speculatin', he gave me as security for the money some stock in that Western railroad—that California branch you know. Citrous Junction, I believe it's called."

"Yes," assented Mr. Hamilton.

"Wa'al, it was valuable stock, and I was hopin' all the while that something would turn up so's I could keep it, for I had some of their stock, and this would give me the control of the road.

"Wa'al, it did. Wardell turned up broke, and

I got a hold on his stock. But the queer part of it is that there's some tangle in the matter—some legal complications that my lawyer is figuring out—and if Wardell only knowed enough he could file an injunction against havin' any of that stock transferred—even his lot that he put up with me as security. That would halt matters until he could make good on something else, and then he could pay me what he owes, and get this railroad stock back. But he don't know that he can do this, and I ain't goin' to tell him.

"It ain't up to me to do so. So all I've got to do is to hold on to his stock until a certain time, and then it will be too late for him to file any papers, and the stock will be mine forever, and I'll control the road. Ha! ha! It's a good joke on Wardell; ain't it?"

"I suppose you think so," said Mr. Hamilton, coldly, "but it seems like hard lines for him."

"Wa'al, he brought it on himself; didn't he? I didn't ask him to borrow my money. He asked me for it. I didn't ask him to go into any of these deals; he went into them himself with his eyes open. Now I'm not goin' to tell him he has a chance to get back his fortune, if he was only smart enough! No, sir. Ha! ha!

"I'm just goin' to keep quiet, and say nothin'. If the time limit expires, and he doesn't file that injunction, or whatever legal paper it is, with the California courts by a certain day, then his security railroad stock is mine, and it will be twice

as valuable as when Wardell owned it. It'll be worth nigh onto a million! That's what I call business, I do!"

"Oh, yes, it's business—of a certain kind," admitted Mr. Hamilton. "And so he has a chance to get back his fortune?"

"Yes, but he don't know it, Mortimer! He don't know it! Ha! ha! That's the joke of it! He don't know it! He don't know it! He! he!" and Uncle Ezra went off into a fit of laughter that nearly choked him.

Dick, in the hall, heard, though not intending to play the eavesdropper.

"So, Wardell doesn't know; eh?" mused the young man. "He doesn't know, and Uncle Ezra thinks that's a joke. A queer joke. Wardell doesn't know what chance he has to get back his fortune. But *I* know, and Uncle Ezra, unless I'm very much mistaken, I'm going to put a spoke in your wheel!" and then Dick went silently upstairs to join his two chums.

CHAPTER IX

DICK MAKES PLANS

"WELL, Dick, so you think you have the very car you want?"

"Yes, Dad, and I can't thank you enough for it. It's a dandy, and we're soon going to make a big trip in it—all the way across to San Francisco."

"More expense! More expense!" exclaimed Uncle Ezra, raising his hands in protest. They were at the dinner table, talking over Dick's plans for the coming summer.

"It won't be much more expensive than going to some resort, Uncle Ezra," remarked Dick, thinking over what he had heard a little while before.

"And I think it will do the boys more good," said Mr. Hamilton. "They'll see something of life, and the experience will be a new one for them. Do you think you can make your car a base of supplies, Dick, and live in it without going to hotels, as you plan?"

"I think so, but we're not going to bind ourselves down by any hard and fast rules. If we want to go to a hotel we'll go; otherwise we'll camp out in the *Last Word*."

"More expense! More expense!" protested Mr. Larabee. "Oh, what is the present generation coming to?"

No one answered him.

"When do you expect to start?" asked Mr. Hamilton.

"Just as soon as the boys can get ready," replied Dick. "It's up to them."

"I'll have to write home," said Paul. "I've no doubt, though, but what my folks will let me."

"Same here," observed Innis.

"What is that?" suddenly demanded Uncle Ezra. "Who is kicking my legs?"

He moved his feet about under the table, but as he sat at some distance from the others it was difficult to understand who could be kicking him. The mystery was solved a moment later, however, for a low growl came from beneath the oak table.

"It's that dratted dog!" exclaimed the crabbed old man. "Mortimer, if I can't eat my dinner in peace——"

"I didn't know he was in here," said Dick, apologizing. "Gibbs, have Grit taken to the stable."

"Yes, Mr. Dick," answered the butler, and again the unfortunate dog was led away, casting a sad look at Dick and a vindictive one at Uncle Ezra.

"It's lucky he didn't bite you," spoke Mr.

Hamilton. "He must have sneaked in here after he was put out before."

"If he had bitten me——" began Uncle Ezra.

"He'd have done it at once, if he had any such intention, I think," interrupted Dick. "Grit isn't savage——"

"Isn't savage!" cried Mr. Larabee. "I'd like to know what you do call it?"

"You don't understand him," suggested the young millionaire. "He's as gentle as a cat with —his friends."

"Then I'm glad I'm not one of his friends!" exclaimed Uncle Ezra.

The dinner went on, the talk being divided among the boys on one side, and Mr. Hamilton and his brother-in-law on the other, with occasional interchanges. Then the millionaire and Mr. Larabee went to the library to talk over some business, and the three chums went out to the garage to look over the new car, and see how it had stood the journey.

"It seems all right," said Dick. "Of course we didn't put much strain on it. When we get out West, trying to cross deserts, ford streams and climb mountains, then we'll see how she stands up. Jove! but I'm anxious to start.

"Say, can't you fellows get your folks on the long distance telephone, and see when you can go?"

Dick was always planning how to make short cuts.

"It's too late to call 'em up now," said Paul. "They'd think something had happened. We'll write."

"Then do it now," urged Dick. "You'll get an answer so much quicker. Explain everything and tell 'em you simply must go! It will do you good."

"Oh, we'll go, all right!" declared Innis, and they went back into the house to write the letters.

Dick got out a big map and began to figure on a tentative route. Not much preparation would be necessary, at least on this side of the Rockies, for he knew he could buy supplies of food and gasoline almost anywhere. Time was no object, so they could go along leisurely, and he made his plans accordingly.

The route would have to be decided on as they went from State to State, for Dick realized that local conditions might vary, and a stream that would be fordable at one time might not be at another.

"It will be a great trip!" he remarked to himself. "But if I could only do something for Mr. Wardell I'd feel better. It doesn't seem fair, the way Uncle Ezra acted, though maybe it's all right according to law. And it doesn't seem right that Mr. Wardell should lose his fortune when he can save it, if he only knew how. I wonder if it would be wrong to act on the information I overheard by accident? I'm going to ask dad."

Mr. Larabee retired early that night, as he always did, and he piled some chairs against his locked door.

"I'm not going to have that pesky bulldog getting in!" he declared. "Drat him! I wish he'd run away."

"Dad!" exclaimed Dick a little later, "I want a little talk with you."

"Want another auto, Dick?" asked Mr. Hamilton, with a smile.

"No, the *Last Word* suits me right down to the ground. It's about Mr. Wardell and Uncle Ezra."

"What do you know about them, Dick?" asked the millionaire, quickly.

"Well, I overheard something to-night," and Dick related it. "Do you know this Mr. Wardell?" he went on. "I bought the car from him, you remember."

"Yes. Well, I don't know that I can say I know him. I used to know his father, and a fine man he was, though he had rather queer notions of business. He was strictly honest, though, and perhaps if he had taken advantage of every legal trick he might have left more money."

"Tricks like Uncle Ezra's?"

"Well, Dick, we won't talk about them. Uncle Ezra is responsible to himself, and, as he says, he is strictly within the law. We all have different standards. But, Dick, what is it you want to do?"

"I want to save Mr. Wardell's fortune for him. You heard what Uncle Ezra said. Can't you take a hand, and change matters?"

Mr. Hamilton thought a moment.

"Dick," he said, "what your uncle told me was in confidence. I can't violate that. I'm sorry—in a way—that you overheard what you did, and yet it may be for the best in the end. I can't act, and yet——"

"Is there anything to prevent me, Dad?"

"No-o-o-o," was the answer, slowly given. "I don't know as there is."

"And you can advise me; can't you?"

"Well, Dick, if you ask me questions, I suppose I'll have to answer them," and there was a twinkle in Mr. Hamilton's eyes. "But Uncle Ezra won't like it if he finds it out," the father concluded.

"He won't find it out!" declared Dick, with energy.

"Now here is how I size it up," the young man went on. "Uncle Ezra got Mr. Wardell's fortune—which consisted mostly of railroad stock—in exchange for a loan."

"Yes, he took the stock, or, rather he has had his lawyers take it, because the money was not repaid to him."

"And it wasn't paid because Mr. Wardell bought other stock that proved worthless. Is that it?"

"That's about it, Dick,"

"And Uncle Ezra sold Mr. Wardell this worthless stock?"

"Well, his representatives did. But look here, Dick, your uncle didn't force Mr. Wardell to buy this worthless stock, you know. Mr. Wardell did that with his eyes open."

"I know, but he didn't know it was worthless?"

"Probably not."

"And Uncle Ezra did?"

"Well, I wouldn't go so far as to say that. There is a lot of stock in the market that is practically worthless, but which is sold with the best intentions in the world. It may be worth a fortune some day."

"All right. Anyhow, Mr. Wardell gave up some good stock, got bad stock, and lost his good stock."

"Yes."

"And now it develops that if, within a certain time, he makes a sort of legal protest—files a paper in court or something like that—he has a chance to get his stock back?"

"Provided, of course, he gives back the money."

"And he is practically assured of his money if he does make that protest, Dad?"

"Yes. It's quite complicated, but, to state it simply, if he files that paper, protesting against losing his old stock, the new stock that he bought will be worth considerable, and out of the money

he gets from selling that he can get back his old stock, which will be worth twice as much."

"It sounds like a Chinese puzzle, Dad, but the main thing to do is, I take it, to file this protest."

"Yes, if it's filed in time."

"That's what I wanted to know, Dad. I see my way clear now."

"What are you going to do, Dick?" asked Mr. Hamilton as he saw his son preparing to write a letter.

"I'm going to tell Mr. Wardell that there's a chance to save his fortune, and I'm going to offer my services to do it for him!" was the quick answer. "I want to have a talk with him."

"Dick, I don't know——"

"Mortimer!" exclaimed a voice in the hall, "I can't sleep with the howling of that pesky bull-dog. I shall have to ask you to have him taken farther off."

"Great Peter!" gasped Dick. "Uncle Ezra!"

CHAPTER X

MR. WARDELL'S CONFESSION

THE tableau which presented itself to the view of Mr. Larabee showed Mr. Hamilton gazing at Dick, and our hero, with a strange expression on his face, looking at his father. He was wondering just how much his uncle had overheard.

"Can't sleep; eh?" repeated Mr. Hamilton, after a pause.

"No, that dog of Nephew Richard's makes such a noise. Can't he be sent farther off?"

"I—I'll have Grit taken away, Uncle Ezra," promised Dick, quickly. "I'll attend to it right away. I'm sorry he annoyed you."

"Huh!" snorted the visitor. "I never could see the use of dogs, anyhow. They eat 'most as much as humans, and never do any work."

"They keep tramps away," said Dick, in defense of his pet.

"Huh! A good shotgun near the door, where a tramp can see it, beats all your dogs, and it don't cost anythin' either," declared Mr. Larabee, with a sniff of disdain. "One charge of powder—not too much—and a little salt and pepper, will do for a whole season of tramps. You don't have to shoot the gun off, you know," he

explained. "Sometimes one load will do for several seasons, and think of the money you save."

"I'd rather have Grit," said Dick, simply.

"Sittin' up rather late; aren't you, Mortimer?" went on Mr. Larabee, who was attired in a faded dressing gown, rather too short for him. It showed his lean legs, the feet encased in ancient slippers, which, Uncle Ezra boasted, had lasted him many years.

"I seldom go to bed early," spoke the millionaire.

"But it's late for Nephew Richard," went on the old man. "Growin' boys should be a-bed early. When I was a lad we went to bed soon after sundown—we had to, for we had to git up at four o'clock to milk. But the present generation has it too easy—they're pampered too much."

"Dick and I were talking business," said Mr. Hamilton, and he glanced sharply at his brother-in-law, to see if he had overheard any of the conversation. If Mr. Larabee had done so, he showed no signs of it.

"Business!" he exclaimed. "Wa'al, of course that's a good thing if Nephew Richard profits by what he hears. I hope he does. But I've lost considerable sleep over that pesky dog. I wish you'd attend to him."

"I will!" exclaimed Dick, hurrying out to the stable. "I guess Grit hasn't done much sleeping, either," he murmured, "not while he knew Uncle

Ezra was in the house, anyhow. I don't see why he has to be so mean—Uncle Ezra, I'm thinking of," went on Dick, reflectively. "I suppose it comes natural, but it isn't very pleasant.

"There's that Mr. Wardell—he's practically ruined him, just on account of a greed for money, when he's already got more than he knows what to do with. Well, I'm going to help that young fellow if I can—I'm going to try to help him get back his fortune. I know how I'd feel if I lost mine—especially by some trick like this.

"Yes, I'll get in touch with him, and see if we can't beat Uncle Ezra at his own game. Come on, Grit," he went on, speaking to the dog, who vainly tried to break his chain the quicker to get near Dick. "You've got to go into exile for the rest of the night, anyhow, all on account of Uncle Ezra. I'm sorry, but it has to be, old man."

Caressing his dog, Dick took him to a distant tool house in the garden, far enough off so that should Grit bark or whine Mr. Larabee would not hear him. The dog whimpered a bit when Dick went away, but soon accustomed himself to the new situation.

"To-morrow I'll write to Mr. Wardell," decided Dick, as he rejoined his father, Mr. Larabee having gone back to his room. Mr. Hamilton approved of this plan, and Dick went to bed to dream of saving the fortune of an unfortunate man, and shooting across country in his big touring car.

"I'll sort of combine business with pleasure," remarked the youth next morning, as he arose and recalled his dream.

The letter to Mr. Wardell having been written, Dick and his two chums took the new car out for a spin. Mr. Hamilton consented to be driven to the railroad depot in it, as he had to go to a distant city on some business. Mr. Larabee, who was going back to Dankville, much to the satisfaction of Dick, refused an invitation to try out the *Last Word.*

"Trust myself in that? Never!" he exclaimed. "I'd as soon think of riding on a fire engine. You mark my words, Nephew Richard, you'll come to grief in that car yet. It's too big and heavy."

"It has to be, for what I want of it," replied our hero. "I'm going to cross the continent in it, and sometimes we may be stuck where there are no hotels. In that case we'll have a hotel with us."

"Oh, the sinful shame and waste of money!" cried Uncle Ezra, dolefully shaking his head.

Dick and his chums, with Grit as a mascot, had a fine ride for a considerable distance out into the country and back. The car behaved perfectly, and Dick found she had more speed than he had suspected. The luxury of it appealed to the three young men, and they were looked on with envious eyes as they sped along the broad highways.

Dick posted his letter to Mr. Wardell, and

then there was nothing to do but await an answer. Paul and Innis planned to go to their homes, to arrange for the long trip with Dick, and were to return to Hamilton Corners in about a week. In the meantime the young millionaire would perfect his plans for the continental tour.

There was considerable to be done in the way of laying out a route, and arranging to communicate with his father at certain points. Also Dick wanted to have plenty of time to aid Mr. Wardell in recovering his fortune.

"And I've got to do it without Uncle Ezra knowing anything about it," decided Dick. "If he found it out he might find a way, law or no law, to prevent us from filing that protst in time. Oh, I've got to be as foxy as Uncle Ezra himself." But Dick little realized the resourcefulness of his relative.

A few days after Dick's chums had gone to their homes, when the former was wondering when he would hear from the man whose car he had purchased, Gibbs came to him in the library one afternoon with the information that a visitor wanted to see Dick.

"Bring him in here," he requested the butler. "Oh, hello, Mr. Wardell!" Dick exclaimed when he saw who his caller was. "I'm real glad to see you. I was getting ready to come on to New York and meet you, as soon as you sent me word."

"Were you, indeed? I thought I had better

take a run up here, though, as I haven't any permanent address in New York at present. I haven't my plans made, and I may go away at any time. But I am curious to know what good news you have to tell me," for Dick had not given the particulars in his letter. "I don't see how there can be any good news for me any more," went on Mr. Wardell, rather despondently.

"Well, there is," said Dick, simply. "What would you say if I told you there was a chance to get back your fortune?"

"I'd say, I'm afraid, that you were dreaming."

"I never was more wide awake. Listen," and Dick quickly related the gist of what he and his father had talked over.

"You don't mean it!" exclaimed Mr. Wardell. "If the papers are filed in time I can save my fortune?"

"That's about it. Can you arrange to file them?"

"I can, I think—no, by Jove! Dick, I can't, either. At least I'm afraid I can't. I'll tell you how I'm fixed. I am about to go to South America for a mining concern. It's a good opening, and it's too good to turn down. I can make my living at it, and in time I may get rich by it. It's a bird in the hand, and it's worth two in the bush, where my former fortune seems to be at present. I don't see how I can go out to San Francisco and to South America, too. And yet

I would like to get back my fortune, for I am beginning to believe that it wasn't taken from me altogether fairly."

"We won't go into that now," spoke Dick. "But can you arrange with your lawyer to furnish the necessary papers?"

"Yes. I guess Mr. Tunison would do that for me, even if I can't pay his regular fee. He's done enough business for our family in the past. But, look here, Mr. Hamilton, what good will the papers do me when I can't go to San Francisco to file them? At least, I don't think I ought to give up a certain, sure thing for one that's only a chance. I can't file the papers after I get them."

"Well, then, I can!" cried Dick.

"You can? What do you mean?"

"I mean that my chums and I are going to take a tour to California. I can combine business with pleasure, and file those papers for you. If I can do it in time, you'll get a chance to recover your fortune."

"And will you do that for me?"

"I certainly will!"

Mr. Wardell clasped Dick's hand in a hearty grasp.

"Look here, old man," he said feelingly, "you've done too much for me already."

"Oh, pshaw! I haven't done anything worth mentioning!" exclaimed Dick, who disliked having a fuss made over him. "I bought your car

as much for myself as to help you out of a hole."

"Oh, it isn't that I mean!" cried Mr. Wardell, quickly. "Dick, I've a confession to make. You may not know it, but you saved my life that day on the railroad tracks."

"Saved your life?"

"Yes, I was down and out! I didn't see a thing to live for, and I wasn't going to look for a reason. I was going to cash in when you and your chum came along, and I didn't have the nerve to do what I was going to do—shuffle off this mortal coil. You saved my life, Dick Hamilton, and now you are going to save my fortune for me. You're doing too much!" and the visitor seemed much affected.

CHAPTER XI

OFF ON THE TRIP

"THAT'S all right now, Mr. Wardell," said Dick, after a rather painful pause. "I'm sure I'm only too glad that I can do something for you. It isn't going to be any trouble—filing this paper, as it's on my way. And, as for saving your life——"

"Oh, you did it—there's no question about that!" interrupted the other. "I was miserable enough to do anything rash, but the kind way in which you spoke to me, and the cheerfulness of yourself, and your chum, made me ashamed to do what I had contemplated. It started me on a new road, thinking of you, and I made up my mind I'd begin over again.

"Now it might seem to you that I ought to look after this matter myself—going out there and filing this paper—but the truth of the matter is that I'm quite disgusted with myself—not knowing enough to take care of my money when I had it. I deserve to lose it. But if you can save it I'm willing to give you whatever share your lawyer thinks fair."

"I'm not doing it for that," declared Dick.

"I'm doing it for—well, I'll tell you later," he finished. But to himself he said:

"I'm doing this for the honor of my family. If he ever finds out it was my uncle who ruined him he'll not think much of my father and myself, even if I was instrumental in saving his life. No, I've got to keep still about that part of it, and save *his* fortune for the honor of *our* family. And I'll do it, too, in spite of Uncle Ezra!"

"Well, it's awfully good of you," went on Mr. Wardell, after a pause. "Now I'll see our old family lawyer, Mr. William Tunison, and have him arrange with you. You say the papers have to be filed on a certain date?"

"Yes."

"Then why can't they be sent out there, and held until it is time to present them to the court?"

"Because the law in this matter is peculiar. The documents have to be filed between certain dates—they can't be presented before the one, nor after the other. There is a period of a few days during which they can legally be presented to the courts, and in that time only. If you sent them out there now they might get filed away in some pigeon-hole, and be forgotten until it was too late."

"I see."

"So the only thing to do is for some one to look after the matter personally. And I'll do it!"

"It's very good of you. I suppose I might do it myself, but I hate to lose this South Ameri-

can chance. It may never come again, and I want to show folks that, even if I have lost one fortune, I can make another. Otherwise I'd go West myself."

"You don't need to. I'll act as your agent," promised Dick.

"Very well, then. I'll arrange with my lawyer. I was so angry and discouraged when I found that my fortune was wiped out that I didn't go into details over it. All I knew was that a fellow named Larabee had cleaned me out. A queer sort of chap he was, too. About as mean as they make 'em, I thought, and quite a financier into the bargain. Ever meet him?"

"I—I have heard of him," stammered Dick. Then he quickly added: "Suppose you give me power of attorney to act for you, and a letter to your lawyer. Then I can see him myself," for Dick did not want to get on dangerous ground as regards Uncle Ezra. "Then you can go to South America whenever you get ready, and I'll look after the rest," he added.

"It seems sort of cowardly, to run away and leave you to face the music," and Mr. Wardell hesitated.

"Not at all!" Dick assured him. "I'll be glad of the chance to do this business for you. It will be good training for me. My father is willing. And," Dick added to himself, "it will give me a chance to get back at Uncle Ezra for some of the mean things he has done to me."

"All right," spoke Mr. Wardell after a moment or two of thought. "I'll give you power to act for me, as my attorney, or representative, or whatever is necessary. And I'll write to my lawyer. He can fix up the papers. Do you want him to come here?"

"No, I am going to New York in a few days, to arrange some details about our trip. I'll see him then. Will you stay to dinner, and meet my father? We can put you up for the night."

"No, thank you. I'll stay for dinner, but I must go back to New York on the midnight train. There is no telling when this South American berth may be open for me."

A little later Mr. Wardell and Mr. Hamilton went over details with Dick, and it was arranged that the latter should complete his plans with Mr. Tunison, the lawyer.

A few days later saw our hero once more in New York. He went by train, as his chums had not yet arrived from their homes, and Dick did not want to drive his big car by himself.

Mr. Tunison proved to be an agreeable gentleman, who readily entered into Dick's plan to try to recover the Wardell fortune.

"Though I'm afraid you're going to have a hard task, Mr. Hamilton," the lawyer said. "This Mr. Larabee is a hard customer. By the way, he is some relation to you; isn't he? I've been looking him up."

"He is," admitted Dick, "but I'm not proud

of it. I would just as soon Mr. Wardell did not know it—at least, until I am successful. I am doing this, in a measure, for the honor of my family."

"Hum! Well, I'll keep your secret. Now it appears from the investigation I have made since I got Mr. Wardell's letter, that this Mr. Larabee isn't appearing in this matter openly himself."

"No?" asked Dick in some surprise.

"No. Whether he is ashamed of what he did, or whether he has sold out his claim to someone else, I can't learn. But he is represented by a Mr. Harrison Black, and I want to warn you against him."

"Warn me?"

"Yes. Mr. Black, while a lawyer, is one of the most unscrupulous attorneys I have ever met, or had dealings with. He is a sharper, just keeping well enough within the law not to be caught. Now, he is handling this matter for your uncle, it seems, and he knows about this time limit."

"I suppose so."

"Yes. He'll do all in his power to prevent us from filing the papers that would give Mr. Wardell a chance to claim his fortune again. So you must be on your guard."

"I will. What sort of a man is this Mr. Black?"

"I will describe him to you," and the lawyer did so. "But he probably will not appear openly himself," resumed Mr. Tunison. "He has other

shyster lawyers who do his evil work for him. Probably you will encounter one of his tools, and as he has a number I can't say which one it will be. Only be on your guard, Mr. Hamilton."

"I will."

"Now then, I will give you the necessary papers, which must be filed with the Supreme Court not before September first and not later than midnight September third."

"Three days!" exclaimed Dick.

"That is all. A short period. To be sure of making no mistake, you had better file them the first day. Don't take any chances. At the same time, it would not be fair to you to have you give up all the pleasure of your trip to be in San Francisco before the first day of next September.

"I understand ycu are going to make a tour in the big car Mr. Wardell had built for himself before his fortune was lost. My advice is to do this, and so arrange your programme that you will reach San Francisco September first. That will give you plenty of time. I have a lawyer friend there, Mr. Whitfield Ainslie, who will attend to the California legal end for you. Now I will prepare the papers."

It did not take long, and after getting a few more detailed instructions from Mr. Tunison, Dick left for Hamilton Corners. When he got home he found Paul and Innis waiting for him.

"Well, when do we start?" asked Paul.

"Yes; we've been doing nothing but dream of this trip!" cried the other.

"We'll leave this week!" declared Dick.

And he was as good as his word. His plans were completed, the route finally decided on, and, with the auto thoroughly in shape, the boys started off early one morning, Grit sitting proudly beside Dick, who was at the wheel.

"Take care of yourself, my boy," cautioned Mr. Hamilton, as he shook hands with his son and his chums.

"I will, Dad. If Uncle Ezra asks for me—well, tell him I'll see him later!"

"I will. Have you the papers safe?"

"Yes, they're in the auto where no one can find them. I'll write as often as I can. All ready, boys?"

"Let her go, Dick!" cried Paul.

"Start off!" exclaimed Innis Beeby.

Dick pressed the button of the electric starter. There was a hum, a throb of the powerful motor, and the big car moved slowly out of the yard. Dick and his chums were off on their long trip.

CHAPTER XII

UNCLE EZRA PLOTS

"WHAT'S our time-table, Dick?" asked Paul, as they swung out of Hamilton Corners into the less-populated country.

"We haven't any. That is, we're not going to try to make any special time, as long as we get to 'Frisco by September first," for Dick had told his chums of the endeavor he was going to make to save Mr. Wardell's fortune.

"What's our programme, then?" Innis Beeby wanted to know. "Are we going to run along, hit or miss, or have we some definite plan?"

"I thought I gave you our route."

"Well, old man, we went over it so often, and made so many changes, that I don't know now whether we're going by way of New Orleans or Alaska."

"More like Alaska this time of year!" exclaimed Paul. "Shall I start the electric fan, Dick?"

"Yes, do. There isn't much breeze to-day," and soon a big electric fan near the roof of the touring car was stirring the air, making the three travelers more comfortable.

"This is the schedule the way I have worked

it out," went on Dick, as he steered out to avoid a load of hay being driven along the country road. "We'll go to Buffalo, and from there on to Cleveland. Next, in the order as they come, will be Chicago, Des Moines, Omaha, Denver, Leadville, Salt Lake City, Carson City, Sacramento, and then 'Frisco."

"All good places to visit," observed Innis, reflectively.

"Well, we may not strike all of them," Dick went on. "If we have to change our route because of bad roads, or from other causes, we may cut out the big cities, and just go somewhere near them. But that route will give us plenty of travel."

"I should say so!" agreed Paul. "Nearly four thousand miles, I guess. Well, your car looks good for it, Dick!"

And indeed the *Last Word* appeared able to navigate to the Arctic regions if called on to do so.

"Are we going to put up at a hotel for lunch?" asked Innis, when they had gone on several miles farther. "That isn't a hint that I'm hungry!" he hastened to add, "but I was just wondering, Dick."

"I think we'll try camping out a bit," said that young man. "We might as well get used to it, and the weather is good now."

"That's right," agreed Paul.

"I have some grub stowed away in back,"

Dick resumed. "We will stop at some butcher shop and grocery in the next town, get some steak and bacon, and cook it on our electric stove. Then we can eat it alongside the road. There will be plenty of chances to go to hotels later."

The boys laughed and joked, thoroughly enjoying themselves in the big touring car. It rode easily, even over rough roads, and it was roomy enough so that they could move about in it, not having to stay cramped up in one seat. Paul and Innis took turns at driving, as Dick wanted them to become familiar with the mechanism.

. . . . .

But perhaps if Dick and his chums could have been made aware of a little scene that had taken place in the office of a certain lawyer in Dankville that morning they would not have felt so care-free and light-hearted. About the time Dick started off on his tour a crabbed old man might have been seen going into this law office, on the door of which was the name:

HARRISON BLACK.

"Ah, good morning, Mr. Larabee!" the lawyer greeted his visitor. "Come right in," and the two were closeted together for some time. When they came out, Mr. Black said:

"Now don't you have a bit of worry, Mr. Larabee. I'll attend to the matter for you, and this young man will never see his money again."

"He don't deserve to, anyhow. Folks that is as careless as he was, don't deserve no pity."

"That's right, so they don't, Mr. Larabee. Ha! ha! You have exactly the right idea."

"And now about this foolish young nephew of mine," went on Mr. Larabee. "I didn't hear all he and his father talked about that night when I came down on 'em unexpected-like, but I'm sure my nephew has some crazy notion about helping this Wardell. It mustn't be allowed—he must be stopped!" and Uncle Ezra clenched his fist and struck a desk a smart blow.

"I agree with you, Mr. Larabee. He must be stopped. But does he know of this time limit?"

"He might. I wouldn't take any chances. He's fooled me more than once. Don't take any chances, Black."

"I won't. If he has any papers to file inside the time limit, he won't be allowed to do so. We'll take some means to stop him. Wait, I'll call one of my men who—er—who attends to all these little matters for me. Jake, here, I want you!"

From an outer room came a man with a hard face, and a jaw like that of a prize fighter. He had little, shifty eyes that seemed never to look one in the face.

"Jake this is Mr. Larabee," went on Mr. Black. "This is Jake Morton," to Uncle Ezra. "He'll see that your foolish nephew doesn't do anything rash."

"That's what I want."

"It—er—it may cost something, Mr. Larabee."

"Cost something?" and Uncle Ezra clapped his hand on his pocket. "Not much, I hope!"

"Well, of course your nephew has started off in an auto, I believe you mentioned that."

"Yes, in a great big touring car like a steam coach—him and two other spendthrifts. Oh, the money they waste!" and Uncle Ezra shook his head.

"Well, if they're in an auto, I presume they'll have to be followed in an auto," went on Mr. Black, "and auto hire costs money."

"Couldn't—couldn't they be followed on a bicycle?" asked the crabbed old man. "I wouldn't mind buying a second-hand bicycle for your man, and he could follow them on that. Bicycle riding is healthy."

"Say, if you expect me to trail along after a touring car on a bicycle—and a second-hand one at that—you can get some one else to do this job!" exclaimed Jake Morton. "I'm done! What! Maybe chase half way to San Francisco on an old wheel? I guess not."

"Wa'al, maybe I could stand a new one," whined Uncle Ezra.

"No, nor a new one, either. It's a touring car for me, or nothing!"

"Oh, the sinful waste of money!" exclaimed Mr. Larabee. "The awful waste!"

"You'd much better spend a few dollars to hire a touring car for my clerk than to lose all this money," said Mr. Black. "And, mind you, if your nephew files that paper it may result in a lawsuit, which would be very expensive, and, at the same time might go against you."

"Well, then, if you think it wise, perhaps I'd better. I don't want to lose this money I've worked so hard for."

A smile of something like contempt curled the lip of Mr. Black. He knew just how hard Mr. Larabee had "worked" for his money, for many a mortgage he had foreclosed for him, and many a transaction he had consummated—transactions that never got into the law courts.

"Then if you don't want to run any chances, you'd better do as I say," went on the lawyer. "My man will look after matters. You say your nephew and his chums have gone off on a tour. Do you know the route they are going to take?"

"Not exactly, for, though I looked and listened the young spendthirfts changed their plans so often I wasn't able to keep track of them. But they are going to the main cities. Why, would you believe it, they'd think nothing of going hundreds of extra miles, just to get to some place to see the sights! And gasoline is gettin' more and more expensive every day, to say nothin' of tires. Oh, the waste of it!"

"Well, I suppose your nephew is well off?"

"Yes; too much so for his own good!"

sanpped Uncle Ezra. "If I had the handlin' of his wealth, there'd be a different story to tell."

"I can well believe that," remarked the lawyer, drily. "Now to get down to business. Pay attention, Jake Morton. You will have to follow this party of young fellows in the big touring car as best you can, since Mr. Larabee doesn't know the exact route they will take."

"No, I couldn't find out," mumbled Uncle Ezra, "though I heard something of Buffalo, Cleveland, and so on."

"I guess I can get on their trail, all right," said the lawyer's henchman. "If it's a big touring car, as you describe, it ought to be pretty conspicuous. Folks will notice it and I can make inquiries as I go along."

"Yes, but keep your wits about you. Don't let them suspect, for they are sharp lads, I take it."

"Oh, I'll play foxy, all right. I'll hang back for a few days and watch my chance."

"But don't delay too long," cautioned Uncle Ezra. "Automobile hire is expensive, and I'm not as rich as Mortimer Hamilton. Don't go wastin' my money."

"Well, I'm not going to starve on the trip," laughed the man. "I've got to live decently if I'm to pose as a touring autoist."

"Oh, dear!" groaned Uncle Ezra. "This is going to cost a pile of money—a dreadful pile!"

"But you're going to make a lot out of it!" insisted the shyster lawyer.

"Maybe—maybe," assented the old man. "And say," he went on to Morton, "you'll get that paper away from him. I know he has some sort of a paper to file, to cheat me out of my hard-earned money. I was sharp enough to find that out, though he and his father think they fooled me. But I was too much for 'em—I was so—ha! ha!" and he chuckled so that he went into a coughing fit, and had to be thumped on the back to bring his breath into his lungs again.

"You—you'll get that paper; won't you?" he pleaded.

"Sure I will," declared Jake Morton. "And they won't know I have it until it's too late to file it."

"Good!" exclaimed Uncle Ezra. "And maybe, while you are at it, you could get that auto away from my nephew, or wreck it, or something like that."

"Good land, Mr. Larabee! You don't mean that; do you?" cried Mr. Black. "Wreck your nephew's auto?"

"Oh, not with him in it, of course. But if it could be disabled some way, maybe he'd desert it, and we could get it, and fix it up and sell it. I might get enough out of it to pay for the expenses of this trip, for it's goin' to cost a lot—a dreadful lot."

"I wouldn't advise you to try that," said the lawyer, significantly. "We're taking enough

chances as it is. You don't want to make yourself criminally liable; do you?"

"Oh, my good land, no! Sakes alive! No! no!" cried Uncle Ezra. "I've always kept within the law. We ain't goin' to do nothin' unlawful; are we?" and he gazed anxiously at the lawyer.

"Oh, no. I'm not any too fond, myself, of overstepping the law. But I'll take all it allows!" he declared, thrusting out a lean and claw-like hand.

"Oh, so will I!" exclaimed Uncle Ezra. "All the law allows—yes; all the law allows! Ha! ha! I guess you'll find, Nephew Richard," he went on, "that two of us can play at that little game you started. Two of us;yes-um! We'll see who wins out! Ha! ha!" and, chuckling in a cackling sort of voice, Mr. Larabee left the lawyer's office, while Mr. Black and his henchman looked at each other.

"What do you think of him?" asked Mr. Black.

"I don't like to think. But, as long as he pays our price, we'll do his work; eh?"

"Yes. Now come in here and we'll talk over what's best to do. We must get that paper away from Dick Hamilton."

CHAPTER XIII

THE HAND IN THE DARK

"SAY, this is a little bit of all right; isn't it?"

"It certainly is. I'll have some more of that steak."

"Another morsel of bacon would just about suit me."

"Those eggs aren't so bad. That electric stove cooks quick enough."

"I should say yes. Any more coffee left?"

Question and comment thus went back and forth among the three chums as they sat in Dick Hamilton's big touring car, under a great oak tree at one side of a pleasant country road.

They had traveled many miles from Hamilton Corners before stopping at a village grocery and meat market and buying what they wanted for dinner.

"Going camping?" the man had asked them, as he wrapped up the parcels.

"No, just on a tour," Dick said.

"Oh, then you're going to cook over an open fire?"

"No, we're going to cook it right in the auto," the young autoist said.

"Ha! ha!" laughed the man. "Joking; eh?

Well, I know you auto fellows have some new wrinkles, but I didn't think you were up to that. Going to broil the steak on your over-heated engine, I suppose, and make coffee with the hot water from your radiator? Ha! ha!"

"Not exactly," replied Dick. "Though that might be done. No, we have a stove of our own," and he showed the man the little electrical apparatus in the rear of the enclosed tonneau, on which a good meal could be prepared.

And the boys had just finished their culinary operations and were now enjoying the fruits of their labors. They were in a secluded place, and the day was all that could be desired. The little table had been let down from the roof, and the three sat about it, laughing and joking.

Farmers and others passing along the highway paused to look in some astonishment, not only at the big car, which was of a type and size seldom seen, but at the boys themselves, who seemed to be taking their ease in regular Gypsy fashion, yet in a style never approached by the dark-skinned nomads.

"Some class to this," remarked Paul, as he passed his plate for more steak and bacon.

"I should say yes," agreed Innis. "I say, old boy, you're not going to take that egg; are you?"

"Why not, I'd like to know?" retorted Paul, pausing in the act of helping himself to a nicely browned one, nestling amid a pile of crisp bacon.

"Because you've had three, and that's mine—or Dick's, if he wants it."

"No, I don't want it," said the latter. "But it isn't worth quarreling over. We can fry some more."

"I guess we'll have to if Paul is going to develop that kind of an appetite," remarked Innis. "Three eggs, twice on the steak, and no end of bacon——"

"I did not!" snapped Paul.

"Did not what?" asked Innis, with a smile.

"Did not have three eggs. It was only two, and——"

"Well, this'll be three," retorted Innis.

"Oh, well, then I'll split it with you," and Paul cut the egg in half, thus settling the dispute.

"Well, there's one consolation in eating this way," remarked Dick, as the auto-meal came to an end. "We don't have many dishes to wash," and he tossed from the window of the car the wooden plates from which they had dined.

"That's right," agreed Paul. "Washing dishes is the worst part of camp life. Some day I'm going to invent a set of dishes that wash themselves."

"These are just as good," said Dick. Though there was in the auto a small set of porcelain dishes, the boys had decided that, except for food that actually needed other styles, they would use the wooden plates, that could be thrown away after each meal. They carried a supply of these,

as well as paper napkins, and more could be bought whenever needed.

Of course there were pans and other utensils for the stove, and these were cleaned after being used, and stowed away in the proper compartments.

"Well, I guess we're all ready to start again," announced Dick, as they got out and walked about a bit, pausing to get a drink at a roadside spring.

"Where to?" asked Paul.

"I'll take a look at our map and see," went on the young millionaire. "I think we can make Hosford by evening, and stay there over night. There's no use journeying after dark until we have to."

"That's right; not until we find we have to put on speed to file that paper in time," added Paul.

"But is there a hotel in Hosford?" inquired Innis.

"We'll not bother with a hotel," suggested Dick. "As long as we have the bunks in our auto we might as well use them. We'll just pull up at some quiet place, off the road, get our supper, and turn in. We're independent of hotels, unless we want to go to one now and again to have more room to stretch. That's why I got this kind of a car."

"Sure enough!" exclaimed Innis. "We'll bunk here then."

And they did that night. At first it was a bit

awkward, but soon they got used to the not too large apartment into which the auto was turned, and they found the bunks very comfortable.

The curtains were drawn over the glass doors and windows and with an electric light glowing in the roof, the boys went to sleep, well satisfied with their first day's trip.

They were under way soon after breakfast and traveled a good distance by noon, stopping for their meal in a little grove of trees just off a country road.

"What's the programme for to-day?" asked Paul, as they started off again, leaving a pile of wooden plates behind them as a souvenir of their stop.

"Hand me that road map, and I'll decide," spoke Dick. "It's in the flap pocket of that side door, nearest you, Paul."

Paul pulled from the leather compartment on the door an envelope, and handed it to Dick.

"No, that isn't it," said the young man. "Those are the papers I'm going to file with the court to save Mr. Wardell's property. The map is in the same place, in an envelope just like that. Now you've got it," as Paul pulled out another bulky envelope.

'Do you think it's safe to keep the law papers in such a place?" asked Innis.

"I don't see why not," replied Dick. "I don't want them in my pocket, for they might slip out when I walk around. And if I put them any-

where else in the auto I couldn't get at them in a hurry in case we caught fire, or had any accident. No one would think of looking in there for them, and if we leave the auto at any time we can take the documents with us. Now let's have a squint at this map. I think we can make Flagtown to-night."

"Flagtown!" exclaimed Innis, looking over his chum's shoulder. "That's quite a run."

"Well, we haven't tried out this car much as to speed yet," replied Dick. "There are good roads to Flagtown, and we might as well see what she can do. We'll hit up the pace a ittle."

And they did make Flagtown, the *Last Word* proving that she had speed as well as other qualities, though she was essentially not a racing car.

Supper followed, in due time, and then, sitting about the auto in the quiet of the evening, the boys talked over their adventures of the day, and speculated on what lay before them.

"It will be a good joke on your Uncle Ezra, to get Mr. Wardell's fortune away from him; won't it?" remarked Paul.

"It sure will," declared Dick. "And the best of it is that he doesn't know that I'm going to do it. Uncle Ezra is pretty sharp, but I think we got ahead of him this time."

But if Dick could have known that a few miles back, in an auto that had closely followed the course of the big touring car since the day before, was a certain mean-faced man, perhaps the young

millionaire would not have felt so confident. Especially could he have known that the man in the rear auto was constantly making inquiries about the *Last Word*—when she had passed through certain towns, and which way she was headed.

But knowing none of these things, Dick and his chums turned into the bunks with a feeling of peacefulness and ease, and slept soundly. All too soundly, it would seem. Too soundly to have heard a car pull up behind them shortly after midnight.

The car came to a halt some distance away from Dick's, the red tail-lamp on the latter disclosing its presence. From the rear car a man silently alighted to the dusty road.

"Are you sure that's the machine?" a whispered voice asked.

"Yes, I'll stake my reputation on it. We've followed it too close to be mistaken, and they haven't had time to shake us."

"That's right. Well, Jake, do your best. Mr. Black expects us to make a record on this job."

"I know he does. That old skinflint of a Larabee isn't going to pay very heavy, though. It was all we could do to squeeze this car out of him."

"Well, now we've got it we can do as we please. Think you can pull off anything?"

"I don't know. I can sneak up there and see

how the land lays, anyhow. If we can't get the papers now we will have to some other time. But I think those lads will sleep well to-night—they had quite a day of it."

"I should say so! It was all I could do to drive this old car to keep up with 'em, and this isn't a slow machine, either. Well, if you're going, go ahead. I'll wait here."

"And be ready for a quick get-away in case—well, in case anything happens."

"Sure, I'll be on the job."

The figure in the road stole quietly toward the big touring car. As he came nearer he walked more and more slowly, and getting to within a short distance of the *Last Word,* he remained silent—listening.

"'All quiet along the Potomac,'" he quoted. "I guess I'll take a chance."

Again he stole forward.

In the darkness of the night a hand stole softly out toward one of the side doors of the big car. A pair of evil eyes looked in on the sleeping lads. Then the hand stole down in through the opening in the door, an opening as in a coach, covered with glass, but which glass had been dropped down to let in the air.

"I'll see what luck I have," murmured the voice of the man in the dark. Lower stole in the hand in the night. The fingers encountered the flap of a pocket. There was a start of surprise.

"By Jove!" whispered the voice. "I have it—first crack out of the box!"

The hand withdrew itself, with a bulky envelope, and, hesitating a moment to be sure that none of the sleepers had awakened, the man of darkness put in the same pocket another envelope of the same size as the one removed, and hurried back down the road to the waiting car.

"What luck?" his companion asked.

"Best in the world. I got it, and switched another bundle of papers in place of those I took. Now speed her, but—but run silently until you get some distance off."

"I get you all right. Hop in."

And the car sped away in the darkness, while Dick and his chums slept on.

CHAPTER XIV

A BLOCKED ROAD

"Oh! Ah! Um!"

"Who said get up?"

"Gee-whiz, but I'm tired!"

"So is the auto—rubber tired."

"Joke! Ha! Ha! Everybody snicker!"

The three chums turned over on their bunks in the *Last Word*, and looked one at the other.

"Well, if you fellows are going to lie abed all day, I'm not!" exclaimed Paul, he and his two companions having just indulged in the little morning "roundelay" I have used to introduce this chapter. He sprang form the bunk.

"'Up, up, Lucy!'" he quoted. "'The sun is up, and I am up too!' First reading lesson. Come on, fellows!" and he pulled the covers from Dick.

"It's too comfortable here," said that youth, gazing at the ceiling of the car where the electric light was yet glowing. Reaching out his hand Dick switched it off. "And yet I suppose we might as well get up," he went on. "Innis, you're nearest to it, turn on the stove, will you, and set the coffee to boiling? Then we'll have grub and see what the day will bring forth."

A storage battery in the car furnished current for the stove. The coffee had been put in the pot the night before, with cold water on it, and now all that remained was to shove it over on top of the electric stove, and set it boiling by the turn of a switch.

"The simple life—this," remarked Innis, as he complied with his host's request. Then, as the grateful aroma of coffee filled the car the lads dressed, and were soon washing at a nearby spring, which they had discovered the night before in a patch of woods, not far from the road.

Breakfast over, they were once more ready to proceed. Dick started the car from his seat, and sent it going at a moderate pace. They had no special objective point in view, and were content to take dinner wherever noon found them.

Through villages and towns they passed, attracting no little attention as they scurried along. Once an officious constable warned them against speeding.

"You went a leetle too fast comin' in," he said, throwing back the lapel of his coat to display his badge. "You fellers want t' be careful goin' out."

"All right," agreed Dick, with a laugh. "We'll be careful. Are the roads pretty good now?"

"Yep. Fine! That's why I warned you fellers. It's a great temptation t' speed. Only last week a feller was caught outside of town. We've got one of the finest speed traps in the coun-

try," he went on proudly. 'I don't s'pose I ought t' tell you 'bout it, but I will, seein' as how you're strangers, an' that's a kind of car we don't often see around here.

"It's like this. I've got a man stationed near the fust mile post outside th' village proper. When he sees an auto comin' he marks down th' time it passes him, and then he telefoams to another of my men at the next mile post.

"Now if that there auto gits to the second mile post too quick, we know it's exceedin' th' speed limit, so we jest stop 'em an' collect th' fine. Squire Bradley is always ready t' hear the case. He'll come in from his hay field, or even stop plowin', t' hold court."

"I suppose it pays him," remarked Paul, while Dick was seeing about renewing the supply of gasoline, a stop having been made for that purpose.

"Oh, yes, it pays middlin' well," admitted the constable. "Th' Squire gits half th' fine, an' th' other half goes t' me an' my assistants."

"How do you stop the speeding autos when they get to the second mile post?" Innis wanted to know.

"Ha! That there's my patent. I've got a long rail fixed on a sort of hinge, like an old-fashioned well-sweep, you know. When an auto ain't exceedin' the legal rate of speed the long pole sticks straight up in the air alongside the road. But when my man at the first mile post

telefoams to Hank Selby at the escond post that a car is comin' too fast, Hank jest yanks on a rod, down comes th' pole across th' road, an' th' car can't go on no further."

"I see," laughed Paul. "Hank yanks!"

"That's it! I see you fellers will have your leetle joke!" and the constable laughed with them.

"But supposing the car didn't stop?" asked Innis. "That pole across the road wouldn't be hard to break; would it?"

"No, I don't s'pose 'twould. But when they bust that pole they're bustin' th' law, too, an' that's a more serious offence. Squire Bradley jest doubles th' fine then."

"But how do you catch the autoists once they are past the second mile stone, supposing they have broken the pole?" Paul asked, much interested in this sort of a speed trap.

"That's easy," said the constable. "As soon as any one is rash enough t' bust our pole, Hank jest telefoams to his brother, who lives down the road a piece. His brother runs out and drops a lot of boards, with sharp nails in 'em, in th' dust. An auto ain't goin' fur after it runs over a few sharp pointed nails. No, sir-ee!"

"You 'nail' 'em; is that it?" asked Innis.

"That's what we do. We nail 'em! Ha! Ha! I never thought of that. It's another joke, by ginger!"

"It must be pretty expensive, keeping two telephones working," suggested Paul.

"Oh, the county pays for it," said the constable. "Anyhow, if they didn't, we could clear enough on fines to do it. Squire Bradley could raise the rate a leetle."

"I suppose so," agreed Innis, "Well, we'll be getting on, I guess," he added, as Dick came out of the garage after paying for the gasoline.

"An' don't try any speedin'," cautioned the representative of the law.

"We won't!" promised Dick.

Their trip up to noon was uneventful. They were in a section where good roads abounded, and a local automobile club had posted the route so they did not have to stop to ask their directions. They went to a local country hotel for dinner, as the place was well advertised as giving a good chicken and mushroom dinner, and this was a menu that the boys did not care to undertake on their small electric stove.

"Jove! That was good!" exclaimed Dick, as they came out of the hostelry.

"That's right," agreed Innis.

"I think I'll see if they have a couple of roast fowls that we could take along with us, and eat cold for supper," suggested the young millionaire, and he carried out his plan, a brace of well browned chickens being stowed away in the "kitchen" locker.

Late that afternoon they came to a place where two main roads forked. Either one would take

them to the place where they had decided to stay over night.

"This one's a little the shorter," explained a farmer, whom they asked about it, "and it's a good road. The only thing is that there's no crossroad leading from it for about eight miles, and you may git stuck in the middle, and have to come back."

"How so?" asked Dick.

"Why Bill Simpson is moving his house along this road. He's changing the location, and he may not be off the highway by the time you get there. I did hear, though, that he expected to have it off the road and on the new foundation by night."

"Well, we'll take a chance," said Dick. "If the house blocks the road maybe we can go around it."

"Maybe," assented the farmer, and the big car went on.

They had nearly reached the end of the fine, level road, and were congratulating themselves on soon getting to a fair-sized town where they intended to put up for the night, when Paul, looking ahead, exclaimed:

"There it is Just our luck!"

"What?" inquired Dick from the back of the car, for Innis was steering.

"Bill Simpson's house—it's blocking the whole road, and it looks as if the men had given up work for the day, for they're getting a red

lantern ready to display. We can't get past, Dick."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed the young millionaire. "We'll have to turn around and go back, I guess. Lose a lot of time, too. Drive up, and let's see what it looks like."

CHAPTER XV

PUZZLED

"Looks bad enough."

"Yes, the more so as you come closer."

"I don't see any way but to go back."

"That's right. Lucky we've got room to turn."

Thus Paul and Innis exchanged remarks and criticisms as they approached the house which, being moved from one site to another, now blocked the entire road.

"There's no chance of getting past, without running the risk of getting fast in the ditch," decided Dick, as he got out of the car and took a careful survey. "I guess we're stuck, boys."

"Funny they're quitting work so soon," observed Paul, looking at his watch. "Why, it's only four o'clock, and they're getting ready to leave, and hanging out a red light."

"We've got to do it," said one of the workmen. "Our windlass busted just now, and we can't do anything until it's fixed. No way of moving the shebang."

"You could if you had enough horses," said Dick. "Why can't you hitch two or three teams directly on the pulling rope, and yank the house

a little further along—or even back—that would give us room to pass."

"It can't be done, young feller," said the man.

"Why not?"

"Because we ain't got the horses to do it. There'd be four teams needed, at the very most, to snake this house ahead or back, without a windlass to give us leverage. That's what we need—leverage."

"You've got ropes and pulleys; haven't you?" asked Dick.

"Sure we have."

"Can you attach them to the back of the house as well as on the front?"

"Sure we can. But what good is that going to do? There ain't enough horses that we can get now to snake the old building out of the way. We'll have to wait until morning, and then we can get a blacksmith to mend the windlass."

"Yes, and in the meantime I'm stuck here!" exclaimed Dick.

"Well, that is too bad, but you can turn around and go back to the other main road."

"That's eight miles or more, and I won't get to Fullerton until long after dark, even if I break the speed limits."

"Well, what can we do?" appealed the man, while his fellows prepared to go to their several homes.

"I'll tell you what we can do!" cried Dick, with sudden energy. "Put your tackle on the

back here and I'll pull the house far enough this way so I can get past. It's just at the wrong point in the road for me to do that now. Ten feet either way will let me pass."

"I s'pose it will, but land sakes! you can't pull that house with anything you can rig up now. Where's your horses?"

"Horses? I don't need horses. I've got seventy-five of 'em right here with me."

The man's face was a picture of startled surprise. He looked from Dick to Paul and Innis, who were silently laughing, and then he inquired:

"Which one of you is his keeper?"

"What's that?" cried Dick. "Do you think I'm crazy?"

"I'm sure of it," said the man, confidently. "Move this house—seventy-five horses—got 'em with you! Where? In your pocket?"

"In there!" replied the young millionaire, pointing to the hood covering the engine of his auto. "I'll pull the house out of the way."

By this time a crowd of workmen had gathered. Dick stood in front of his big car, not at all put out by the curious glances cast at him.

"What's the matter here?" asked a man who seemed to be in charge.

"This young feller wants to get past," explained the man who had been about to hang up the red lantern. "He can't 'count of Simpson's house bein' in the road. Says he'll snake it fo'rd or back so's to make room."

"Back, not forward," said Dick. "I can't get past to hitch on to the front end or I'd haul it ahead for you. But, as it is, you won't lose more than ten feet, and I really have a right to half the road."

"Yes, I s'pose you have," agreed the foreman. "But I don't see how we're going to give it to you. I never thought that windlass would bust so soon. I knowed it was an old one, but I figured it would last until we got Bill's house moved. Howsomever——"

"I tell you I can move the house!" exclaimed Dick. "If you'll have your men attach the tackle to this end I'll pull it far enough back so I can get past."

"How?" demanded the foreman, dubiously.

"He says he's got seventy-five horses," put in the man with the red lantern. "I guess he's from some asylum," he added in a whisper loud enough for Dick to hear.

The latter smiled and answered:

"Perhaps I should have explained. My auto is about seventy-five horsepower. If you'll fix the ropes so I can hitch them to my rear axles I can pull the house far enough back so I can pass. I think I have a right to ask that."

"Yes, I guess you have," assented the foreman. "We'll let you try. We can pull her back again in the morning after the windlass is fixed. Get busy, boys!" he exclaimed. "Put the ropes on this end."

"But what about the windlass?" asked the lantern man, referring to the spindle on which the rope was wound.

"I won't need it," declared Dick. "I can get enough purchase with the pulleys. I'll be turning the car around, and by that time you can have the ropes in place."

Turning the big car in rather a restricted roadway was no easy matter, but Dick accomplished it, and soon he had it backed up toward the rear of the house, to which the men were attaching the ropes, rove through heavy blocks.

The house was elevated on piles of short crossed beams and jack screws, and was being slid along big timbers, common yellow soap and tallow making the ways slippery enough so that friction would, in a measure, be overcome.

Dick took a long rope, and put it around the rear of his car so as to strain it as little as possible. Then this rope was bent on to the one connecting with the system of pulleys.

"Are you all ready?" called the young man to the foreman, who had had his men re-arrange the beams.

"All ready!" came the answer.

Dick's motor was running. With himself at the wheel, while three of the heaviest workmen had been added to Paul and Innis in the tonneau to give weight and trackage to the machine, Dick threw in the speed gears and released the clutch.

There was a whining, groaning noise. The

roped tautened, the pulley blocks shrilled out a protest and then the house was seen to quiver.

"She's moving!" cried the lantern-man.

"By Jupiter! So she is!" agreed the foreman, in surprise.

"Watch out!" warned Dick, "and let me know when I have her far enough!"

He turned on more power, threw in the second speed gear and then the house began moving more quickly, while the astonished men looked on.

In a short time, pulling directly on the main rope as he was, Dick had moved the house back far enough so that he could pass to one side, the building having been halted in a particularly narrow part of the road.

"That'll do!" shouted the foreman.

"All right," answered Dick, bringing his machine to a stop. "Now we'll try to get past."

It did not take long to disengage the ropes, turn the auto, and negotiate a way to one side of the building. Dick came to a halt on the now unblocked road, and called his thanks to the foreman for being allowed to do as he had done.

"Don't mention it!" was the answer. "You saved me ten dollars. I'd been fined that by the county authorities for blocking the road over night."

"Then we're even," laughed Dick. "Good night!"

"Huh! He ain't half as crazy as I thought he was," observed the man with the red lantern

as he hung it on the rear of the house to warn night-drivers of the danger.

Dick and his chums sped on, and soon reached the town for which they were headed. They bought some more food, which, with the cold chickens, made a good supper. Then, as they did not like the looks of the only hotel in the place, they drove out a little way into the country and prepared to spend the night.

Dick was the first up the next morning.

"What's the route to-day?" asked Paul, turning over in the bunk.

"I'm going to try to make Buffalo."

"What! Buffalo?"

"Sure, we can do it by taking short cuts, I think. Let me have a look at that road map. Hand it over, Innis."

From his cot Innis reached into the pocket on the inner side of the door, and hauled out an envelope. This he handed to Dick.

"What's this? Where did this come from?" asked the latter, as he pulled out several blank sheets of legal paper. "This is a funny trick. Our road map has been transformed into nothing."

"Maybe I got hold of the wrong envelope," suggested Innis. "Here's another," and he pulled out a second.

"No, those are the legal papers," said Dick, after an examination. "See if the map isn't there."

It was not, and a search of the other places in the auto where it might have been put did not reveal it.

"This is queer," exclaimed Dick. "Our road map disappears, and we have some blank papers in its place."

"But the legal papers are safe!" exclaimed Paul.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that there's been some crooked work here. Some one tried to get those legal papers, and took the road map by mistake."

CHAPTER XVI

THE LAME MAN

For a moment Dick stared at his chum uncomprehendingly. Then a light came over his face, and he said:

"By Jove, old man! I believe you're right."

"I'm sure of it," declared Paul.

Innis looked at the two in some bewilderment.

"I wish you'd kindly explain," he said. "I may be bright looking, but I guess I'm an awful dunce when it comes to making a stab at what you two are getting at. The road map is gone—I get as far as that—and the legal papers are safe. But how do you decide that a change has been made?"

"Easy," answered Paul, showing a bundle of the kind of paper known as "legal cap," with red lines down the side. "These were in the envelope containing the road map. The map and the legal documents were in the same pocket on the auto door. I remember, for I looked at the map to see how many miles we had made after we crossed that river."

"Maybe it dropped out on the road," suggested Innis. "Mind you!" he said, quickly, "I'm not saying this to be stubborn, but I want to make

sure that we're not overlooking anything. For if it's true, what Paul says, it means that there's somehing wrong going on, and that we've got to be on our guard."

"I believe you," asserted Dick, "and I'm just as glad to have you raise all the objections you can. We want to be very sure of what we're about. Now it's pretty well settled that none of us have had the road map since it was put in the flap pocket last night. The envelope of legal papers looks just like the road map, and any one putting their hand in after dark, might get one in place of the other."

"And, lucky for you he got the wrong envelope," said Innis. "It's a good joke on whoever it is."

"Yes," agreed Dick, "and I'm beginning to have an idea of who it is."

"Who?" demanded his two chums.

"My Uncle Ezra, of course. Who else would have an object in preventing me from trying to save Mr. Wardell's fortune?"

"Ha! Ha!" laughed Innis. "I can just see his face when he looks in that envelope and sees nothing but a road map. That's a rich one; eh, Grit?" and he patted the bulldog, who wagged his stump of a tail energetically.

"Yes, it's a good joke," mused Dick; "but I don't believe Uncle Ezra will be the first one to appreciate it."

"What do you mean?" asked Paul.

"Why, that my uncle didn't personally take that envelope," went on Dick. "He must have hired some one to do it for him, just as he tried to get me off my yacht that time."

"And he got badly stung, too!" exclaimed Innis. "Just as he did this time."

"But we mustn't let that make us careless," went on Dick, "Uncle Ezra, if it was he, won't give up so easily. He'll have another try."

"But if he does get the papers so long before the time when you have to turn them over to the courts, Dick, can't you get other copies?" asked Paul.

The young millionaire shook his head.

"Mr. Wardell has left for South America by this time," he said. "It would be almost impossible to trace him now, in time to get him to execute new papers, in case these were lost or taken," and Dick looked at the valuable packet. "Of course I could cable him, if I knew on what ship he had sailed, but I don't.

"To find that out I'd have to go back home, and maybe even then his lawyer wouldn't know. You see Mr. Wardell was so ashamed of how easily he had been fooled that he wanted to get off by himself somewhere. Maybe he didn't leave his address. So I'd have quite a task tracing him.

"He depends on me to do this business for him, since I have undertaken it. He didn't do it himself for two reasons. He didn't have much

idea that he could ever get his fortune back, I guess; and, for another reason, he didn't want to lose the only chance he might have to make another in this South American matter. If that is successful, I understand, Mr. Wardell will come in for a big share of the profits.

"Now then, since he has trusted me, and since so much depends on these papers, we've got to take good care of them. I'll hide them in a new place. I guess under the cushions of one of the bunks will do. They can't be gotten away in the night without one of us knowing it," and Dick proceeded to carry his plan into execution.

"But how do you suppose the map was taken last night?" asked Paul.

"It would only be guess work," replied Dick. "Probably some one in an auto sneaked up near us after we were sound asleep, reached in and took the first envelope his fingers met with. That's the most plausible theory, though I don't say it's right."

"But why an auto?" asked Paul.

"That's about the only way Uncle Ezra's agents could keep after us. They must have our route down pretty fine, and now I'm sorry I didn't keep quieter about it when we were laying it out. I talked freely before Uncle Ezra, and, now I recall it, he was at our house more often since we began getting ready for this trip, than ever before. He must have overheard what dad and I planned to do."

"It looks so," admitted Paul Drew. "But why does he make all this fuss about it? Why doesn't he wait until the time comes, and then file in court a legal paper that would offset the one you have for Mr. Wardell, Dick?"

"Because this is a peculiar case," explained his friend, who had gone over it in detail with Mr. Wardell's lawyer. "No papers can be filed before a certain date, and only within certain times. All Uncle Ezra could do in the meanwhile would amount to nothing, unless he could get these papers away from me. And that wouldn't be so important if Mr. Wardell hadn't left the country and gone to a place where I can't get at him in time to have him execute a new power of attorney. So we've got to take good care of these papers, boys."

"And we've got to get a new road map," said Paul.

They stopped at the next town they came to and got a fine map, showing the best roads to take. Then, in furtherance of his original plan, Dick headed for Buffao, which he hoped to make before nightfall.

"Couldn't you change your route, and fool your Uncle Ezra, Dick?" asked Innis, after dinner that day.

"I could in some ways, but the cities we have planned to pass through are on the best route to San Francisco. Of course I could switch off on side roads here and there, but my idea is that

if Uncle Ezra makes any other attempts they'll be made in or near the big cities. He knows every one where I'm going to touch."

"And this car is a regular landmark," complained Paul. "Everyone will remember it once they see it."

"Well, there's no use worrying until we have to," observed Dick. "We'll keep the papers as well hidden as we can, and a sharp watch out."

"It's a wonder Grit didn't give the alarm last night," said Innis.

"That's so," exclaimed Dick. "But the trouble with Grit is that he's too friendly with everyone except Uncle Ezra. He got that from the boys at school making such a fuss over him. He thinks everyone is his friend, and if a chap was only to speak gently to him Grit would wag his head off. That's probably what our night visitor did. Grit, you're no good!"

Grit barked happily, as though he had just been paid the greatest compliment in the world.

They drove the car hard that day, and had the satisfaction of arriving on the outskirts of Buffalo just as dusk was settling down. And then they had their first bit of bad luck.

From lack of oil, one of the bearings became heated and an inspection in a garage disclosed the fact that some new Babbitt, or anti-friction metal, would have to be put in.

"A two days' job," the repair man said.

"Punk!" exclaimed Dick. "Well, we'll have

to lay over, that's all. Come on, fellows, we'll go to a hotel and take a run out to Niagara Falls to-morrow."

So, after all, the accident had its advantages, for they quite enjoyed the trip to the big cataract. The auto was repaired on time, and in the interim Dick kept the valuable papers in his own pocket.

"If we only knew what sort of a man, or men, to be on the watch against, it would be easier," remarked Paul, when they were ready to proceed again.

"That's just it," admitted Dick. "We can't tell who Uncle Ezra will send, nor when they'll appear. But I think, after once being fooled, they'll go a bit slow. We won't worry, anyhow,"

They were on the main road out of Buffalo, and were counting on making Cleveland their next big stop. Their schedule called for leisurely traveling, for they were in no special hurry, desiring to enjoy the trip as much as possible.

"Here's a good chance to make speed," remarked Paul, as he sighted the long, straight road ahead of them, after they had turned out of a bad stretch.

"Yes, let her out a bit," suggested Dick, who had turned the wheel over to Paul.

They sped along at a rapid pace, keeping a watchful eye out for motorcycle speed-officers, when, as they rounded a curve, which Paul took

at rather too great speed, they saw just ahead of them an auto drawn diagonally across the road.

"Look out!" cried Dick. "There isn't room to get past. What did he want to stop that way for?"

"Maybe he had a breakdown," suggested Innis.

"It looks so," admitted Paul, as he slowed up. As he did so a man walking with a perceptible limp came from the other side of the car, where he had evidently been tinkering with the mechanism, and held up his hand as a signal of distress.

"What's the matter?" asked Dick, as his big car came to a stop.

"Steering gear's broken," said the lame man, "and I can't push the car out of the road myself. It's a mean place to have an accident."

"Yes, especially as it makes the road impassable," said Paul. "Well, I guess we can get you out of the way all right. Is the break a bad one?"

"Yes, the steering knuckle has gone all to pieces. I tried to fix it, but I don't dare drive the car with that out of commission."

"I should say not," agreed Dick. "You'd be climbing a tree before you knew it," and he walked toward the disabled car, the lame man following closely, after a sharp glance at Dick's handsome machine.

CHAPTER XVII

GIVING HIM A LIFT

DICK HAMILTON bent over the disabled steering gear of the car that was slewed across the roadway. As he did so he gave a start that was noticed by Paul, who was directly back of him.

"What is it?" asked his chum.

"Nothing—er that is—I should say it *was* a smash!" finished the young millionaire in louder tones, speaking to the lame man. "It looks as if something hit it."

"Something did hit it," went on the other autoist, limping up. "I ran over a piece of iron lying in the road. My wheel kicked it up, and the first thing I knew one end had hit the steering knuckle.

"It cracked as though I had struck it with the hammer, and I found myself shooting across the road. I brought up standing, with both brakes set, and I jumped out in such a hurry that I gave my ankle a twist. It hurts like the mischief, too! I was trying to see if I could patch up the steering gear in any way, when you came along. I didn't want to block up the highway any longer than I had to. But if you'll give me a hand I think we can push the car out of the way."

With the boys and the lame man pushing at the disabled auto it was soon rolled to one side, allowing a free passage, which a few minutes later was taken advantage of by several cars. The occupants looked curiously at the broken machine, but, seeing that the unfortunate autoist had assistance, they did not stop.

"Well, that's done!" exclaimed Dick, as he and the others rested from their labors. "Can we do anything else for you, Mr.—er—?" and he paused suggestively.

"Brockhurst is my name," said the man, quickly. "Samuel Brockhurst. I'm from Buffalo, and I was out on a little run when this accident happened. It comes just at a wrong time, too. I had an appointment with a man in Hazelton," naming a town about twenty-five miles away, "and now I can't keep it in time, I'm afraid. I can't get back to the city in time to catch a train, and there's no garage around here where I can hire a car. I do seem to have the worst luck!

"But there's no use in burdening you with my troubles," he added, with a frank smile. "I'm very thankful to you for what you've done for me. If you wouldn't mind stopping at the first garage you come to, and telling them to send out for this machine, I'll be obliged to you."

"Of course we will," said Dick, quickly; "but can't we give you a lift on your way? We're going close to Hazelton, and if it will be any

accommodation to you we can just as well make that town."

"Oh, no, I wouldn't think of troubling you. I've delayed you enough at it is. I might go on to the garage with you, if you don't mind, and then I could tell the man just what the trouble is. He might even have a car I can hire, though, as I remember it, the nearest garage is a small, one-horse sort of a place. Still, they can mend the steering knuckle I should think."

"Come on then," urged Dick. "We'll take you as far as there, and if you can't hire a car you're welcome to ride to Hazelton with us."

"Oh, Mr.——"

"Hamilton—Dick Hamilton," supplied our hero.

"I couldn't think of it, Mr. Hamilton. I wouldn't put you to that trouble for the world."

"It's no trouble," Dick assured him. "I believe in being helpful whenever I can. I might be in the same boat myself some day."

"It doesn't look as though your car would ever break down," said the lame man. "It certainly is a beauty. What make is that?"

"It was built to order," said Dick, "and I got it in a deal when the owner couldn't take it. It just suits me."

"I should think it would suit anyone. It's a peach! Are you going far?"

"To San Francisco!"

"You don't tell me! That *is* a tour, all right.

My car looks small alongside yours, though my machine is considered a pretty good one."

It was a good one, Dick and his chums could see, and the small break could easily be repaired. After making sure that the disabled car was well out of the way of traffic, and leaving a written notice on it to show to whom it belonged, Dick, his chums, and Mr. Brockhurst entered the *Last Word,* with the first named at the wheel, and once more they were under way.

Mr. Brockhurst proved an agreeable companion. He had traveled much, and could talk well of the places he had visited, telling a number of funny stories that kept the cadets laughing.

On reaching the garage the man in charge promised to send out and get the car.

"But as for renting you one, I can't do it," he said to Mr. Brockhurst. "There isn't a one in the place, except Colonel Carter's, and he'd have my head off if I loaned that, though he only drives it about once a week."

"I wonder if I couldn't see him and make some deal with him?" asked the lame man. "It's important that I get to Hazelton this morning."

"Say!" interrupted Dick. "What's the use of going to all that bother. I'll be glad to run you down. It's only ten miles out of our way, and we are ahead of our schedule. Anyhow, a day or so doesn't matter to us. Come on, Mr. Brockhurst."

"Oh, I don't want to put you out——"

"It will be a pleasure to have you," said Dick, and he meant it. His chums, too, were glad of the man's company.

"And I'll show you how the electric stove works," went on Dick, for the lame man had been much interested in the fittings of the big car.

"All right—if you insist!" and he laughed in an engaging manner. He left orders about his car, and was soon in the big machine with Dick and his chums, who resumed their journey.

They had purchased some supplies in the village where the garage was situated, and, reaching a secluded place on the road, they began the preparation of a meal on the electric stove.

"Now I insist on you letting me help," said Mr. Brockhurst. "I'm a sort of old bachelor myself, and used to cooking. Shall I bring up a scuttle of coal, or a pail of water?"

"We don't need coal," said Dick, "though we might have some water. That looks like a spring over there."

"I'm the water-boy!" cried the lame man, as, with all the exuberance of youth, he limped off with a collapsible rubber pail toward the spring.

CHAPTER XVIII

A DISAPPEARANCE

"WELL, you boys certainly know how to live! This is great!"

Thus exclaimed Mr. Brockhurst as he sat in the shade of a big tree on the edge of the country road, eating lunch with Dick and his chums. It had been cooked in the little "kitchen" of the auto, but as it was rather warm they had elected to eat out in the open air, and a board, laid across two stumps, served excellently as a table. Paul, whose turn it was to cook, also acted as waiter.

"This isn't half bad," admitted Innis, reaching for some more chicken sandwiches and olives.

"You'd have to go a good way to find anything better, in my opinion," spoke the lame man. "I never realized before what chances there were in a big touring car. It's better than traveling by train, for you can stop and start when you like. And with the outfit you have here you're independent of almost anything—even the weather."

"Yes, we can close ourselves up in the car," said Dick, "and rain or snow, up to a certain limit, won't bother us."

"I wish I was going all the way with you,"

went on the lame man. "But I've got my business to attend to. If this deal in Hazelton goes through I may be able to have a car like yours. It certainly is a dandy!"

"Perhaps we are delaying here too long," suggested Dick.

"No, I've got considerable lee-way yet," said Mr. Brockhurst. "I can meet my man in time, and this lunch is too good to miss. By the way, there's a fine view to be had from the hill over there. Suppose we stroll over and take it in. It won't take long, and it's well worth seeing."

"As long as we'll be in time for your appointment, all right," assented Dick. "Our time is our own."

"Don't worry about me. Come along," and, lunch being over, Mr. Brockhurst led the way along a path that went up a rather steep hill.

"Do you live around here?" asked Paul, wondering how the lame man knew of the view so far out from Buffalo.

"No, not exactly. I used to, when I was a boy, but the city is my home now. I don't often get out into the country, and when I do I like to take advantage of it."

"That's the idea," said Dick.

They walked on, chatting about various subjects. Dick had taken a certain electric switch out of his car, without which it was impossible to start it, so he had no worries about leaving the auto in the roadway unprotected.

"Are we walking too fast for you?" inquired Dick, and his two chums, who happened to be looking at him, thought the young millionaire regarded their visitor with a rather strange glance.

"Oh, no, I can keep up this pace," he said, though he seemed to be walking more and more slowly. "I did give my ankle a bad twist," he went on, "and I'll have it looked to as soon as we get to Hazelton. It isn't much farther to the top of the hill now."

They had gone only a few steps more, when, with an exclamation of pain, Mr. Brockhurst came to a halt. His face was screwed up in an expression of anxiety.

"I'm afraid I'd better not go on any further," he said, sitting down on a grassy place. "I don't want to strain my foot too much. I'll wait for you here. Go on and get a look at that view. You wouldn't want to miss it. Lots of people go miles out of their way for it. I'll just sit here and rest."

"Are you sure you'll be all right?" asked Dick.

"Oh, sure. Go ahead. Don't mind me. I'll wait until you come back. And there's a good spring on that hill. It's supposed to have some medicinal virtue. I don't take much stock in that, but I know it's good and cold, for I used to drink there when I was a boy."

"I'm going to have some," asserted Paul. "I'm as dry as codfish."

Though the boys somewhat regretted not hav-

ing Mr. Brockhurst to accompany them, the thought of a cool drink at the summit of the hill hurried them on, for the day was warm.

They looked back to see the lame man still sitting on the grass plot, gazing up at them. He waved his hand in a friendly fashion.

"Say, this is some view!" exclaimed Paul, as they reached the summit.

"I should say yes!" assented Dick. "I'm glad we came up."

Down before them, rolling in a series of gentle slopes, was a vast extent of country. There was a great plain, and, in the distance, mountains arising, blue and purple in the haze of the summer day.

"It's magnificent!" murmured Innis. "It makes a fellow feel—well, like poetry," he finished for want of something better to say.

"It makes me more thirsty to see that water," added Paul, pointing to a little stream, that, like a silver ribbon, made its tortuous way through a distant green meadow.

"Let's look for that spring," suggested Dick, after a few minutes of gazing at the view, which was really superb.

But the spring was not as easy to find as they had supposed. They finally located a small brook, and, tracing it back some distance, they came upon the spring. It justified all that Mr. Brockhurst had said of it, and the boys drank long and deep.

"It's got a queer taste," said Dick.

"That's the medicinal virtues of it, I guess," laughed Innis.

"Well, it's all right when you're thirsty," assented Paul, "for it's good and cold, but I'd have to get used to it before I'd want it steady. Well, shall we go back?"

"Might as well," said Dick, looking at his watch. "We've been here half an hour. Mr. Brockhurst will be getting tired."

They started down the slope, and, when they got to a point where they should have seen the lame man he was not there.

"He's gone!" cried Innis.

"Probably got tired of waiting, and went back to the auto," spoke Dick. "He'll be waiting for us."

But his chums thought they detected a strange note in his voice.

The three hurried on, and when the auto came in sight they peered eagerly toward it for a sight of their vistor.

"Maybe he's inside," said Paul, when they could not see him.

"Maybe," said Dick—rather grimly.

They reached the car. The side door was open, but there was no sign of the lame man.

"He's gone!" gasped Paul.

"I thought that was his game," said the young millionaire, quietly.

CHAPTER XIX

A SIMPLE TRICK

DICK'S chums looked at him for a moment without speaking. He was quite cool while they were much excited.

"What's that you said?" asked Paul, thinking perhaps he had not heard aright.

"You expected him to skip out; did you?" asked Innis.

"I did," replied Dick, calmly. "That is, after he sent us on to see the view alone. I thought maybe he might wait until we got nearer to Hazelton, but he evidently got what he wanted—a good chance—and took advantage of it."

"Yes, and maybe he took something else, too!" cried Paul. "Have you looked for your papers, Dick?" and he peered into the car.

"That's so—those legal papers!" added Innis. "He was one of your uncle's agents, Dick!"

"Don't worry," said the young millionaire with a quizzical smile. "I have the papers safe," and he pulled an envelope from his pocket. "I've been carrying them there ever since I saw that broken steering knuckle," he went on.

"What in the world had the broken steering knuckle to do with it?" asked Paul.

"Because it had been deliberately smashed with a hammer, to knock his car out of commission," went on Dick. "He wanted a breakdown, and he made it to order. He knew we were coming along and would give him a lift, and he counted on getting possession of what he wanted. So I've been suspicious of him ever since. I thought it safer to carry the papers with me, and I guess I did right. Innis, just see if our road map isn't missing again."

The cadet put his hand in the flap pocket where the map was kept. His fingers came out empty.

"Cæsar's pineapples!" he cried. "It's gone, Dick!"

"Yes, and I expect Mr. Brockhurst, or whatever his name happens to be, is bemoaning his poor luck. Score another miss for Uncle Ezra."

"Be careful, though, Dick," warned Paul. "Three times and out, you know."

"That's right, old man. I've got to be careful. We'll have to adopt some new system of hiding it, I guess."

"But say, Dick, how did you get onto that fellow's curves?" inquired Innis. "You didn't tip us off."

"No, I wanted to see just how far he would go, and I didn't want him to get suspicious. I knew I had the game in my own hands as long as I held the papers. You see it was this way:

"When I first saw his stalled car I didn't think anything but that he was a fellow motorist in

hard luck. But when he told that yarn about a piece of iron in the road flying up and cracking the steering knuckle I knew he wasn't telling the truth. No piece of iron could fly up with sufficient force to do that. Besides, the dent of the blow was inside, where no flying missile, unless it could turn a corner, could hit. So I deduced that a hammer had been used."

"Regular detective," laughed Paul.

"I should say so," agreed Innis.

"Well," went on Dick, "then I noticed his limp. He had a no more sprained ankle than I had."

"If he wasn't lame, he was a good actor," declared Innis.

"That's it—he really was lame!" exclaimed Dick, quickly. "It wasn't put on at all, and I knew then that he was permanently disabled, and that it wasn't from the jar of suddenly leaping out of a car."

"How could you tell that?" asked Paul.

"By his shoes. You know how a shoe will get full of wrinkles if it's walked in in a certain way for any length of time. A lame person's shoe will get wrinkles in it that no other person's would. It was that way with this man. When he limped I could see certain wrinkles on the side of his shoe, and the wrinkles had been there for some time, showing he had been lame longer than since to-day."

"Good boy!" cried Paul.

"Then I was sure I had him," resumed Dick, "and it was only a question of time when he would make a break."

"And he was playing all that time to get possession of those papers?" asked Innis.

"That's what," answered Dick, "only he got the wrong bunch. I guess I'll have to charge my road maps up to Uncle Ezra if this keeps up."

"But how did he know you were coming along the road where he disabled his car?" asked Innis. "And how could he figure out that you'd give him a lift?"

"I don't know," replied the young man, frankly. "But it might be easy enough to lay such a trap for us. You see my uncle knows our route almost as well as we do ourselves. He could tip off some unscrupulous man, and he could be on the watch for us. Our arrival in Buffalo would soon become known, for, as I've said before, this car is rather conspicuous. Then it was easy enough to figure which road we'd leave by. All that was necessary was to be in waiting, and the little trick of the disabled car did the rest."

"Only you were too sharp for him," put in Paul.

"I was lucky," was the way Dick put it. "You see he wanted to get us away from the car, and that talk about the view and the spring did it. Then he pretended he was tired out, and, as soon

as we were out of sight, he hiked back to my auto, and rummaged it."

"I hope he didn't take any of our grub!" exclaimed Innis. "I have what the English call a 'rare old twist on,' I'm hungry, in other words."

"It was papers—not food—he was after," said Dick.

"But when you knew his game, and suspected what he was up to, weren't you afraid to let him go to your car, and you remain at the spring?" asked Paul.

"No, for I felt sure he wouldn't do any damage. I knew he couldn't start it, and I had the documents. Those were the only two things to worry about."

"I see!" exclaimed Innis. "Well, what's to be done next? I mean after eating," he added quickly.

"We'll have to think up a plan," remarked Dick. "I guess, too, we might change our route a bit. If Uncle Ezra's men are going to make trouble for us, let's put as many hurdles in their way as we can."

"That's what I say," agreed Paul.

They discussed this matter at length as they prepared a simple meal. Before they could decide on a change of route, however, they would need a new road map, and this Dick said he would get in the next town.

Soon they were under way again, there being

no signs of Mr. Brockhurst in the neighborhood. He had probably made the best time to get out of sight; then he could take matters more leisurely.

"Though when he sees nothing but a road map in that envelope, marked 'legal papers,' he'll have a 'rare old fit,' as perhaps some of your English friends would say, Innis," and Paul smiled at his chum.

"Did you mark that road map envelope 'legal papers'?" asked Paul.

"Sure I did. I wanted to fool them. And the papers are marked 'road map,'" said Dick. "I just changed envelopes, see!"

"Then I've just thought of the best way to fool any more men your Uncle Ezra may set after us!" exclaimed Paul. "Listen, Dick. You remember that story of Edgar Allan Poe's —'The Purloined Letter'; don't you?"

"I think so—yes."

"What was it?" inquired Innis, who was not much of a reader.

"Why, Poe tells of some one who had a certain important letter which the police were after. This man was foxy, and knowing the police would search his rooms for it, he didn't hide it in any out-of-the-way place, such as the leg of a bed, or in a secret recess in the wall, for he knew the police would search there."

"Did they?" asked Innis.

"They did. But they didn't find the letter. It was right in plain sight, all the while, though."

"In plain sight?"

"Sure. This man just took an old crumpled envelope, that didn't look good enough to hold a receipted gas bill, and stuck this important letter in it. Then he jabbed it into a card rack, where everyone could see it. The police never suspected for a moment that their man would do such a simple thing, and they passed over this old envelope a dozen times. You see they were looking in the hard places, while, all the while, it was in the easiest place."

"Well, what's the answer?" asked Innis, as Paul came to a stopping place.

"Why can't Dick do the same thing?" asked his chum.

"How do you mean?" that young man wanted to know.

"Why, just get an old advertising envelope, put your papers in that, and jab it up back of that looking glass," and Paul indicated a mirror on a side of the car. "Let part of the envelope stick out, Dick, and if those men search until doomsday they'll never find it."

"I believe you're right!" Dick cried. "I'll do it."

"It will be safer than carrying the papers in your pocket," went on Paul, "for there's no telling when you may be held up, and searched. Your uncle might hire some one to pose as a road agent just to get a chance to go through your clothes."

"That's right," agreed Innis.

"But they'll never think of taking an old advertisement envelope, that looks as though it was just stuck away behind the mirror and forgotten," went on Paul.

"You're right—we'll fool 'em!" cried Dick, and at the next stopping place this simple trick was carried out.

CHAPTER XX

DOWN HILL

"You'd never suspect it was there; would you?"

"Not at first glance."

"And unless we meet with some one who was as clever as the amateur detective that Poe tells about, who looked in the simplest place for the letter instead of in the hardest, we'll be safe," said Paul.

The three chums had just finished carrying out their little plan. Back of the mirror there stuck, half-way out, an envelope bearing in large type the name of an auto firm. It was obviously an envelope meant to contain a circular, but into it Dick had slipped the important papers.

"We'll leave 'em there until we go to sleep in some hotel," he explained, "and then I'll hide them somewhere in the room. But I'm not going to carry them about with me."

"You couldn't come to a wiser decision," declared Paul. "Did you get a new road map?"

"Yes, and a better one than our lame friend took. I'll have a joke with Uncle Ezra when I see him again. I'll send him a bill for two maps, and he'll wonder what's up."

"I don't want to say mean things about your relatives, Dick," began Innis, "but——"

"Go as far as you like!" interrupted the young millionaire. "You can't hurt my feelings by saying anything about Uncle Ezra. What is it?"

"Well, I was just going to remark that he had an awful lot of nerve to try to stop you from saving this Wardell's fortune. Don't you think so yourself?"

"I do, Innis. But you must remember that my uncle is a peculiar man. Money is more to him than anything else. He hates to see it 'wasted,' as he calls it, though I believe in enjoying the good things that money can buy—to a limited extent, of course. But, no doubt, Uncle Ezra feels that he is doing right, that he is well within the law, and that he has a claim on this man's fortune, though I think he got it away from him by unfair means. Or, rather, he is going to try to get it away from him. But he won't if I can stop him."

"That's the way to talk, Dick! But how can your uncle think it is right to send men to search your auto for papers?"

"I suppose because my uncle thinks he has a right to the papers."

"Maybe so," agreed Paul. "But say, if we're going to reach Plattsville by night, we'd better get a move on."

They had come to a halt a little way out of the town, not far from Buffalo, where they had

bought a new road map, and secured the envelope into which the legal papers were slipped. They had abandoned the plan of going to Hazelton, when they found out the trick that had been played on them, and were now counting on making Plattsville in time to stay just outside it over night. They did not travel after dark, unless it was to reach some predetermined point of their journey, and on this occasion, as there was no good hotel in Plattsville, they had voted to sleep in the big auto.

Once more they started off, Paul driving, while Dick and Innis overhauled the stores in the "kitchen," in preparation for getting a meal in case they did not find a good restaurant in the next town.

"The beauty of this way of traveling," said Innis, "is that you can do as you please. If you want a course dinner you can get it—if not in one town, then in another. Or if you want simple grub, it's here ready for us."

"That's right," agreed Paul. "It was mighty white of Dick to ask us along."

"I'm sure I was only too glad to have you," said the latter. "I wouldn't have gone alone for a farm; would we, Grit?" and the bulldog barked his answer.

"I guess you're hungry," went on Dick. "Innis, open some of that canned chicken."

"What! Are you going to eat so near supper time?"

"I am not. It's for Grit."

"Shades of Uncle Ezra! What would he say if he were here? Canned chicken for a dog! Oh, the sinful waste!"

"That's just what Uncle Ezra would say if he *were* here," laughed Dick. "And I half wish he was, so I could tell him what I think of him.

"But there! It's best to keep peace in the family if you can. Uncle Ezra is trying to ruin a young man, financially, and I'm trying to save him. It may come out even in the end, and that will be all right. There you are, Grit!" And the bulldog barked in delight as Dick gave him a generous helping of canned chicken.

"That makes me hungry," called Paul, from the steering seat.

"We'll soon be at Plattsville," answered Dick. "Say, you are hitting up the pace, all right!" he exclaimed, as the big car swung around a curve and careened down the straight road.

"This is a good place to make time," answered Paul.

"Don't get caught in one of those speed traps the old constable was telling us about," warned Innis. "I don't want to waste good money on some justice of the peace."

"I'll be careful," promised Paul, and he slowed down a bit.

They found a good restaurant in Plattsville, and so decided they would not get their own supper, as they were rather weary with the day's

journey. The big auto was left outside, and to keep the curious crowd that gathered from going inside it, Dick locked the doors. The legal papers were left in plain sight, and while perhaps an older person might not have taken that risk, the boys thought they were doing the best thing.

Grit was allowed to roam about while the travelers were eating, and later, after Dick and his chums had gone up the street a little way, to buy some things they needed, they missed the dog.

"Why, where is Grit?" asked Dick, as they got in the auto again, to drive to the outskirts of the town, where they decided to "camp" for the night.

"I haven't noticed him since coming from the restaurant," said Paul. "I took it for granted that he was following us."

"So did I," said Innis.

Dick leaped from his seat and went back. There was no sign of his pet, and the waiters said the bulldog had gone out after them.

Dick looked up and down the street. Not far from the restaurant was a stable, setting back some distance, and reached by an alley.

"Maybe he's in there," suggested Paul. "It may remind him of the barracks at Kentfield Academy."

"Maybe," assented Dick. "I'll take a look."

As he neared the stable he heard the muffled

barking of a dog. A burly man sauntered out of a shed and demanded:

"Whatcher want here?"

"Have you seen anything of a bulldog?" asked Dick.

"Naw."

"That sounds like my dog barking."

"Aw, that's me own pup. He's allers barking."

Something in the man's manner made Dick suspicious.

"Would you mind letting me see him?" he asked, quietly. "Perhaps my dog got in there by—er—mistake."

"Naw, he ain't there. An' dis is private property—see? You'd better vamoose!"

"I think I'll take a look just the same," insisted Dick. He glanced about and saw that Paul and Innis were coming into the alley. "Reinforcements," thought Dick.

"Did you locate him?" called Paul.

"I think so."

The surly man came forward.

"Hi, Bill!" he called to some one in the shed he had left. "Here's a couple of fresh guys that need lookin' after."

"Oh, we can look after ourselves; thank you," said Dick. Then, raising his voice, he called sharply:

"Here, Grit! Hi, old man!"

A perfect chorus of barks answered him. The

young millionaire sprang toward the stable, but before he could reach the door there was the sound of a rattling chain, that seemed to snap. Then came a choking gurgle, and the next moment the door burst open and Grit, leaping and bounding, rushed out.

"Grit!" called Dick.

The dog barked an answer, and then, trailing the broken chain after him, made a rush at the surly man.

"Look out!" called Paul. "If he gets hold of you——"

The man did not stop to hear the rest of the warning. With a leap he made for the shed he had left, pushing his companion before him, and slamming the door shut in time to cause Grit to bound fiercely up against it.

"He's a lucky chap," murmured Innis, while the dog leaped and bounded about the closed portal, barking with rage.

"Here, Grit!" called Dick.

His pet, after a moment of hesitation, and a longing look at the shut door, came to him limping.

"The brutes!" exclaimed Dick, as he saw where his dog had been kicked. "I've a notion to have them arrested."

"It will only make a lot of trouble, and delay us, to testify against them," said Paul. "Let's get out of here."

"I guess that's best," assented Dick. "They

tried to keep my dog, though. But you were too much for 'em; eh, Grit?"

The bulldog nearly turned himself inside out trying to wag his short tail, and fawned about his master and the latter's chums.

A crowd had collected at the alley entrance, and through it the boys pushed their way, the assemblage giving respectful room to Grit, who was in no gentle humor. It was plain that the stablemen, seeing a valuable dog, had enticed Grit into the barn—no hard task, since he was fond of horses—and had tried to prevent Dick from recovering his pet.

But all's well that ends well, and soon the trio, with Grit on the seat of honor in front, were speeding to the outskirts of the town, where the auto was drawn to one side of the road, and preparations made to spend the night.

They were off early the next morning. Cleveland was their next big city, and in accordance with Dick's plan they changed their route slightly, taking seldom-traveled roads to throw off any spies whom Uncle Ezra might send after them.

Shortly before noon something occurred which nearly put an end to their journey. They had come through a bad stretch of roads and had ascended a steep hill, at the other side of which, according to a local guide, began a good highway.

"Then we can make some speed!" exclaimed Dick. "We've been crawling all morning."

He was at the wheel, and as he started to descend the slope he looked to see that the brake levers were clear. There were three on the big car—the ordinary foot-pedal brake, a hand one for hard stops, and an emergency that locked all four wheels.

The *Last Word* started down the slope, and half way to the bottom something snapped.

"What's that?" cried Innis.

"One of the brakes, I'm afraid," answered Dick.

The car gathered speed. The young millionaire had shut off all power and was coasting. Now he reached for the emergency brake, but the handle was loose in his hand.

The hill was steep—the car heavy, and it was acquiring speed. The foot and ordinary hand brake were powerless to check it.

"We're running down hill!" cried Innis.

"That's what we are," agreed Dick, grimly.

As they flashed past a house a man rushed out.

"Look out for that bridge!" he cried, pointing to the foot of the slope. "It's weakened by a flood. You'll never get over it if you hit it that fast!"

His words died away as the car rushed on down hill, Dick vainly trying to check its speed by the two brakes still in commission.

CHAPTER XXI

MAROONED

"CAN'T you hold her, Dick?"

"Is there anything we can do?"

Paul and Innis shouted their questions at their chum, as he sat at the wheel, guiding the ponderous car on its perilous way. Every stone that could be avoided Dick steered away from, yet to make too much of a swerve, he knew, would be disastrous.

"I'm afraid—it's getting—away from me," he called through his clenched teeth. "The emergency brake is broken, and the others don't seem to hold."

"Can't you put on the reverse?" asked Innis.

"It would only strip the gears. I guess we've got to chance it, boys!"

A man ran out at the foot of the hill, dancing up and down near the approach to the bridge, and waving a red handkerchief.

"Are you going to try the bridge?" shouted Paul.

"I don't see how I can help it," replied Dick. "If I turn into the ditch we'll sure upset."

"Maybe the bridge is stronger than they think," suggested Innis. "It looks all right."

"That's the way with those country bridges," said Paul, bitterly. "They never keep 'em in repair, and even a heavy truck may go through. It's a shame!"

"Well, get ready for something, fellows!" said Dick, grimly. "Do you want to jump?"

"I guess it's the only thing to do," declared Paul. "There's grass on both sides of the road, and we can't be much hurt. You go first, Dick."

"No, you fellows try it. I've got to hold this wheel. The minute I let go this auto is going to be like a wild horse, trying to climb the first tree in sight. Jump, while I hold her steady. Then I'll take my chance."

"I'll steer for you," offered Innis, gallantly.

"No, let me!" insisted Paul.

"I tell you I'll stick to my machine until she smashes!" cried Dick, sharply. "You fellows jump while you've got the chance. I'll try and hold her until she gets to the bridge, and then I may be able to land in the water. Go ahead."

"It's a shame!" cried Paul. "To see this dandy car go to smash."

"It can't be helped," replied Dick, sadly.

Paul opened the door on one side, and Innis on the other. They got in good positions to make their leap. The man on the bridge was still waving his signal of danger, uselessly it seemed, for the big car was headed straight for the structure.

Dick gave a sharp glance ahead, and tight-

ened his grip on the steering wheel. Then he called out, hoarsely:

"Wait a minute, fellows! Hold on! Don't jump yet! Maybe there's a way out yet!"

"How?" yelled Paul.

"See! There's a ford at one side of the bridge!" and Dick nodded his head toward a place where the road over the structure branched off, dividing; one side going down a slope into the stream of water, and up again on the other side, to join the highway past the bridge. This path was used by those who wished to water their horses, or swell their dried wagon-wheels. It was also a ford in case the bridge was out of commission for heavy loads, as at present.

"What's your game?" cried Innis.

"I'm going to try to send the auto down that ford-road," replied the young millionaire. "It's soft and sandy. If I can make the change the soft dirt may clog the wheels enough, and slacken our speed, so that we can get over the creek safely. It's worth trying—in fact, it's the only thing we can do. Hold on!"

Nearer and nearer to the bridge thundered the big car. The man with the red handkerchief had leaped out of the way now, fearing the collapse of the structure. But Dick did not intend to trust himself to the weakened beams and king-braces.

Narrowly watching the road where it forked into the ford, or crossing, Dick swerved the steering wheel ever so little at a time. A sudden

change in the course, he knew, would mean an overturned auto, and possibly serious injury to all of them.

"That's it! That's the way to do it!" cried the man who had waved a warning. "The water isn't very deep!"

"I hope not," murmured Dick. "Hold hard, boys!"

With tense face he watched the path before him. His hands were gripped on the steering wheel so hard that it seemed as though he had no fingers at all—as if they were all in one. The car thundered on. It vibrated and trembled. The brakes that had been set—exclusive of the broken one—were bringing forth a shrill protest from the axle bands.

"I—I guess you'll make it, Dick!" shouted Paul.

"It won't be from lack of trying, anyhow," agreed Innis.

Though he and Paul had come partly back into the car they were still ready to leap in case Dick's plan miscarried. But it seemed likely to succeed.

There was a sudden twist to the steering wheel, and the *Last Word* swerved dangerously. Paul and Innis clutched the sides. Then they saw that the auto was on the short slope that led down to the water. Dick had made the diversion in safety—so far. What would happen when he struck the stream, with its uneven bed, was a matter of conjecture.

But the deep sand of the slope leading down to the water was already having its effect. No better brake could have been devised than that clinging material.

"She's slacking up!" cried Paul.

"We're all right!" added Innis.

Into the water splashed the big touring car. A shower of spray shot up on either side. The machine was slackening speed. Dick was beginning to relax his grip on the steering wheel, and his chums breathed easier.

Then, with a jolt that threw them all forward in a heap, the auto seemed to strike some obstruction in the bed of the creek.

It careened to one side, so that they feared it was about to topple over. Then it righted itself, surged forward, and came to a groaning stop in the middle of the water, stuck fast in the cloying mud that formed the bed of the creek.

"Safe!" exclaimed Paul.

"Not a bone broken!" added Innis.

"But we're marooned!" murmured Dick, gloomily. "It will take ten horses to pull us out of this mudhole. Hang the luck!"

CHAPTER XXII

AN ENGINEERING PROBLEM

After their exciting ride down hill—a ride that might have ended disastrously but for Dick's good judgment and prompt action—the three chums were content to sit still in the stalled auto for a few moments. They were about in the middle of a small stream, that flowed under the partly wrecked bridge, and the water came up nearly to the tops of the big-tired wheels.

This did not represent its real depth, however, as the weight of the car had caused it to sink down in the soft mud, which served to hold it fast. Paul, Dick and Innis looked about them.

"Well, this is the limit!" grumbled the young millionaire.

"It sure is," assented Paul.

"What'd you want to come down hill so fast for?" asked the man with the red flag.

"We didn't mean to," said Dick. "One of the brakes went out of commission, and I couldn't hold the car with the other two, though they're supposed to be able to. Must be something wrong with 'em. I'm going to have 'em looked at when we get out of here."

"If we ever do," suggested Innis. "We sure are stuck fast."

"That's awful sticky mud," volunteered the flagman. "Didn't Bill Hockey, at the top of the hill, warn you about this bridge?"

"Yes, but it was too late, then, to stop," answered Dick.

"Well, I'm here to let only light loads over the bridge," the man went on. "It'll hold a horse and carriage, but not much else. Your auto would sure have gone through it."

"Then I'm glad we didn't chance it," remarked Paul.

"The county is getting bids on having a new bridge built, but when it'll be done nobody seems to know," said the man.

"I don't s'pose you mind, as long as you have a job here flagging," suggested Innis, with a smile.

"Well, 'tain't so much fun in wet weather. I'm thinkin' of havin' a shelter made. But you sure are stuck fast. You'd better go over and see if you can hire some horses. There's a farm just around the turn of the road. Porter Hanson owns it, and he's got a couple of teams."

"I guess it will take more than two teams to get us out," said Dick. "I'd rather trust to a block and fall. Could I get one around here, do you imagine?"

"You might. Some of the farmers has 'em."

"It's going to be quite a problem even at that,"

said Paul, looking across to the other shore with a critical eye. "We can't get a very good hold for the block."

"Then we'll have to make one," decided Dick. "Fellows, we'll pretend this is one of the engineering problems we used to get at Kentfield, and we'll see how we can work it out.

"We've got a weight here to move of approximately four thousand pounds, and the distance, up to the road, is about twenty-five feet. Innis, how much moving force do we require?"

"Not prepared!" answered the cadet, giving one of the stock answers of the class room, and his chums laughed.

"Where are you fellows from?" asked the man with the flag.

"New York," answered Dick, which was true enough, and he did not want to go into details about himself and his chums. "We're students on our vacation."

"Well, it looks as though you were goin' to get your feet wet," remarked the bridge guardian with a chuckle. "If you want to wait I'll go down the creek a ways, and borrow a boat. But you'll have to warn any teams, heavier than a single carriage, not to go over the bridge."

"All right—we will," agreed Dick. "And we'll pay you for your trouble. We'll probably need a boat anyhow when we start to haul the car up on dry land again."

"Well, shall we go ashore?" asked Paul, as

their new friend started off down the bank of the stream.

"And get our feet wet doing it," added Innis. "I'm going to wade barefoot, anyhow," and he prepared to take off his shoes.

"Let's sit here and eat first," suggested Dick. "It's about dinner time, and we've got some hard work ahead of us. I do hope we can get a block and fall."

Dick's plan met with instant favor, and then, in the big car the three marooned travelers began to prepare a meal on the electric stove.

They were busily engaged at this when their new friend came rowing up the stream. He saw the boys sitting comfortably about the table which had been let down from the roof of the car, and his eyes grew big with astonishment.

"Wa'al, I swan t' goodness!" he gasped. "There ain't nothin' slow about you boys; be there?"

"Not so as you could notice it," assented Dick, with a laugh. "Will you have a fried egg sandwich?"

"What? Be you cookin' in there?" cried the man in astonishment.

"Sure!" laughed Paul. "Wait, I'll put an egg on for you in a jiffy!" and he broke one in the aluminum frying pan, while the man was tying the boat to the stranded auto.

"Wa'al, I swan t' goodness!" exclaimed the man, who had said his name was Peter Kinsey.

"This beats th' Dutch! Why, you've got a regular sleepin' an' dinin' car here; ain't you?"

"Somewhat," admitted Dick, while Paul passed out the egg sandwich on a wooden plate.

"Gosh all sizers!" exclaimed Mr. Kinsey, as he bit into it. "It's hot, all right! But it's mighty good jest th' same!" he added quickly.

He ate it with such evident relish that Paul at once fried him another. Then, as the three chums had eaten enough, they put away their cooking apparatus, tossed the wooden plates into the stream, and prepared to get their auto out of the mud.

"The first thing to do," decided Dick, when they had gone ashore in the boat Mr. Kinsey had borrowed for them, "is to see if we can get that tackle. There's no use bothering with horses until we have something rigged up so we can use their strength to the best advantage. Where would we be likely to get a rope and pulleys?" he asked the flagman.

"Wa'al, Josiah McIntyre might have some," was the answer. "He moved his barn last week, and I don't believe they took the rigging away."

"Where does he live?"

"Down the road a piece. Second house on the right. It's painted red and sets back a ways from the road. You can tell him what you want, and say I sent you."

"All right," agreed Dick. "Paul, I'll delegate

you to get the rope and pulleys. Push 'em here in a wheelbarrow, and see if we can hire a team when we need it."

"All right, my hearty!"

"Innis, you and I'll look about for a place where we can hitch the pulley. We may have to set a post. I suppose we could borrow a shovel?" he asked Mr. Kinsey.

"Yes, I've got one here myself. I was digging worms for fish bait. Had to do something settin' here all day. What do you want a shovel for?"

"To dig a hole to set a post in."

"I see. Well, I'll get the shovel, and I reckon you can take one of the busted beams from this bridge. There's a lot of 'em over on the other side."

With the post and shovel provided, Dick and his chums began to see a way out of their difficulty. Paul started down the road after the tackle, and Dick decided to wait and see how long the rope was before setting the post that was to support the pull of the falls against the weight of the auto.

Meanwhile he and Innis awaited the return of their chum, who had gone down the road whistling. The fine big car remained in the middle of the stream, the water swirling between the spokes of the wheels.

"It'll do it good to soak up a bit," said Dick. "It's been so dry lately that the wood was shrinking."

"Yes, it has been terrible dry," agreed Mr. Kinsey. "The farmers have begun prayin' for rain. An' it looks as if we'd get some soon."

Several boys, who had, in some mysterious way, heard of the accident, came running down the road to stand along the bank of the creek and stare at the odd sight. Dick's big car was something new and strange to them, and they made the most of the exhibition.

"Here comes Paul!" exclaimed Innis, as he saw a figure make the turn of the road. "And he's got some one to push the wheelbarrow for him," he added, as he saw a man walking beside the youth.

"Oh, you can trust Paul to get out of the hardest part of the work," laughed Dick. "Never mind, we'll need a man's help anyhow, and I was going to suggest that he hire some one."

"He's evidently done it," remarked Innis.

"Looks as though he had plenty of tackle," commented Mr. Kinsey. "I guess it's what Josiah used for his barn, all right."

"What luck?" called Dick, as his chum came within hearing distance.

"Good!" was the answer. "I've got a long tackle, and we can get two teams if we need 'em. I hired a man to help us rig it up, too."

"Fine!" exclaimed the young millionaire. "Now, Innis, we'll get busy on a practical engineering problem instead of figuring it out on paper."

CHAPTER XXIII

OFF AGAIN

"How's that post now?" called Paul, who with Innis had been tamping dirt about a short beam stuck in the ground some distance back from the edge of the water.

"That's got a better slant to it," answered Dick. "It would have pulled out as it was."

"How are you going to fasten the tackle to the car?" asked Innis, as he and his chum finished their part of the work.

"Take a hitch around the front axle. Here, give me a hand and we'll do that now. Paul, you can go see about the horses. Tell the farmer we won't need them long, and we'll pay him what he thinks they're worth."

"Aye—aye, sir," answered Paul, saluting in the most approved Kentfield Military Academy style, as he started off down the road.

The three chums, with the aid of Mr. Kinsey, and such of the gathered farm lads as volunteered, had been busy the last half-hour rigging up the tackle to pull the big car from the creek. A stout post had been set up to give a fixed purchase, for Dick found that the tackle and fall was of a good type, with one fixed and one

movable pulley—the former with two, and the latter with three wheels. This gave great power, and it would be needed, for the car was deep in the mud, and there was quite a slope to negotiate to the road.

"If she hadn't settled so deep in the mud, I could get her out under her own power," said Dick, as he and Innis fixed about the axle of the car a loose rope, into which could be fastened the hook of the movable pulley. The fixed pulley would be made fast to the post, the boys, after some discussion, having decided that this was the best plan to follow.

The ropes were adjusted, the pulleys were looked after to make sure that they would not foul, and then all that remained was to wait for the horses to come.

Quite a crowd had gathered by this time, a number of boys and men, as well as some women and girls, having been drawn from their houses by the report of the stalled auto.

"What about those papers, Dick?" asked Innis, as they finished making fast the auxiliary rope, and rowed to shore to await the return of Paul.

"They're in the auto."

"Do you think they're safe there?"

"Sure. Safer than if I had 'em in my pocket, where they'd fall out into this muddy creek. Then they would be gone forever."

"Have you the doors locked?"

"Surest thing you know. See anything of Paul?"

"Yes, there he comes, with four horses instead of two, and I'm blessed if he isn't riding one of the nags."

"Sure. What else did you expect? Paul is learning how to take life easy. He'll live longer that way."

"But why four horses? I thought two would be enough?"

"So they might, but I guess Paul doesn't believe in taking chances. Four will be sure to pull us out of the ruck, and two mightn't."

"To say nothing of the fact that the farmer saw a chance to hold you up for a double price."

"Oh, that's all right," said the young millionaire. "I don't mind paying for actual work, and it will be a blessing to get started again."

As usual, when a crowd gathers about anything that is going on, there was plenty of advice offered. One man insisted that Dick had the pulleys arranged wrong, and another held that the auto should have been pulled out backwards instead of by the front.

"But I don't want to go backwards," said Dick. "I'm going on ahead. I want to get on the other side of the bridge. I had trouble enough trying to cross the stream. I might as well finish up, now that I'm at it."

"You'll only get stuck deeper in the mud!" declared this pessimist.

"I guess the horses can get us out," said Dick. "I'll take a chance, anyhow."

The tackle was in shape, and all that remained was to hitch the four steeds to the free end of the rope, and start them. Dick rowed out to his car, and sat at the steering wheel. Two men had been hired to lay planks under the wheels to prevent them from sinking in the soft shore of the stream as soon as they should emerge from the water. Paul and Innis were to have general charge of matters on shore, one to see that the horses pulled when urged ahead, and the other to call a halt in case anything showed signs of going wrong.

"All ready?" asked Innis from his position near the heads of the horses, which the owner was to drive.

"All right here," answered Paul, who was on the shore.

"Let her go!" cried Dick, taking a firmer grip of the steering wheel.

There was a creaking of the ropes and pulleys. The cables tautened; the blocks were lifted up from the ground by the strain. The rope around the axle of the car straightened out. There was a snapping, tugging sound, and then the car began to move slowly.

"She's coming!" cried Paul.

"Keep moving!" urged Dick.

He turned the steering gear about to free the front wheels from the clinging mass of mud.

The car moved faster. Then, as the horses settled to their collars, the big touring machine was slowly pulled from the water.

Then the front wheels struck the planks laid down to receive them, splitting one of the boards. Up the slope went the *Last Word* amid the cheers of the assembled farmers. Up the slope and out on the road, where Dick called for a halt, and jammed on the brakes.

"Whew! I'm glad that's over!" exclaimed Paul.

"The same here!" added Innis. "Is she all right, Dick?"

"I don't know. I'm just going to have a look," and the young man bounded out of his car, and cast a hasty glance over the running gear. That seemed to be intact, save for the broken brake. The engine was next looked to, Dick starting it, with the gears unmeshed. It ran as soon as the electrical switch was turned, and the hum and throb told that it was in perfect condition.

"So far—so good!" exclaimed Dick. "Now, after we have that defective brake looked to, I guess we can get under way again."

"There's a garage about a mile further along," said Mr. Kennedy, who had supplied the horses. "I guess they can fix you up."

"I'll try for it," said Dick. Then he paid the men who had helped him, not forgetting the bridge tender who had gotten the boat for them,

without which Dick and his chums would have had wet feet.

"Where are you bound for?" asked a man in the crowd. He seemed to be a stranger, since none of the others talked to him. He addressed Dick.

"Oh, we're just on a tour," replied our hero, with a sharp glance at the chap.

"Looks as though you could go all the way to 'Frisco in that car," the man went on, as he stepped to the door and peered into the interior of the *Last Word*.

"We could—if we wanted to," said Dick, coolly. "Please don't touch anything," he added sharply, as he saw the man fingering various levers and switches.

"Huh! I didn't mean anything," was the surly response.

"Perhaps not, but you don't know when you might do some damage," went on Dick, "and the car's been through enough for one day. Come along, boys," he added to his chums. "We'll get a move on."

With thanks to those who had helped them out of their predicament, the boys drove off toward the garage where Dick intended to have the broken brake repaired.

CHAPTER XXIV

A NIGHT ENCOUNTER

"DID you think there was anything queer about that man, Dick?" asked Paul, as the three chums sat about the garage, while the chief mechanician looked over the big auto.

"Which man was that? There were so many around us when we got stuck in the creek that I don't remember any special one."

"I mean the chap that suggested you could make a trip to 'Frisco."

"Oh, him. Well, yes, in a way, I did. At least I didn't think I'd give him the satisfaction of letting him guess where we were going."

"I'm glad you didn't."

"Why, Paul?"

"Because I was a bit suspicious of him. Did you notice what he did after we started away?"

"I did not, because I was so busy thinking how lucky we were to get off as we did. What happened?"

"Why, that man—the fellow with the droopy eyes, I'll call him, because his eyes were sort of sleepy looking—he pulled out a note book as we started off, and seemed to be making a record in it."

"Maybe he was a constable, and he thought we might try to speed up after being delayed. He might be looking to get a share of the fine if we were caught," suggested Innis.

"No, he wasn't a constable," declared Paul.

"What makes you so sure?"

"If he was a constable in a country town he'd be some pumpkins, a sort of a Poo-Bah. Instead, no one paid the least attention to him. He might be a constable from somewhere else, but he didn't belong here. He was a stranger, and yet he seemed mightily interested in your car."

"Well, it's a good car—if I do say it myself," responded Dick.

"No, it wasn't that," continued his chum. "That man had some object in view. Dick, do you know what I think?"

"I give up, Paul. You think so much that you have me guessing. What is it now?"

"I think that man was one of Uncle Ezra's spies!"

"What!" cried Dick.

Paul repeated his words.

"Whew!" exclaimed Dick in a whisper, as he pretended to wipe his brow. "This is the limit! Aren't we ever to get away from my Uncle Ezra?"

"Don't misunderstand me," said Paul, quickly. "I'm not an alarmist, and I don't want to be a false prophet, but that fellow acted suspiciously to me."

"I think so too," added Innis.

"Queer I didn't notice it," said Dick, slowly, "but I guess I was so busy thinking about my car that I didn't pay much attention to him. I noticed that he looked in our parlor, so to speak, and——"

He interrupted himself to cross the garage, and peer into the interior of the big machine, underneath which was a workman taking out the damaged brake, ready to put in a new one.

"It's there, all right," said our hero, with an air of relief.

"What?" asked Innis.

"The envelope with the legal papers. Paul's talk gave me a scare. I thought that man might have made off with 'em!"

"No, he didn't get a chance for that," said Paul. "I watched him too closely. But he did get me suspicious, all right. However, we're here, and we'll soon be far enough away."

"Maybe," said Dick. "I'm not going to take any chances on those brakes after the experience we had. They've got to be perfect, and if we have to lay over a day or so, we'll do it. How about it?" he asked the man, who was crawling out from under the big car.

The talk of the young men had been carried on in low tones until Dick asked this question.

"She'll have to come out, and a new band be put on," the workman said.

"How long will it take?"

"Two days. I've either got to send for a new one, or forge one myself."

"Then make it here," said Dick. "If you send for one there may be a factory delay, and I don't want that. If you can fix it do so."

"I can," said the garage man. "This is a special type of car, and no one would probably have that brake in stock. I can make it."

Dick then arranged with him to do the work, and the three chums, after getting some of their belongings out of the car, started off toward the village.

"Where are we going to stay to-night?" asked Innis, as they walked slowly along the country road.

"In our car!" said Dick, quickly.

"What? When there's a fairly good hotel in the village?" asked Innis.

"This talk of Paul's has made me a bit nervous," went on our hero. "I think I'd feel safer if I slept in the *Last Word*. I can fix it with the garage man, I think. And if any of Uncle Ezra's spies are hanging about they may try to disable my car if they can't get their hands on the legal papers. They might do it out of spite."

"That's right," agreed Innis. "Where are the papers now, Dick?"

"Back in the car."

"Don't you think that's risky?"

"No more so than carrying them about with me. I'm a sort of fatalist. I believe if a thing

is going to happen it will happen. But I'll do all I can to stop it.

"They're less likely to think the papers are in the car than that I have them. And even if they do pull out that advertising envelope, and look in it, all they'll see at first glance will be an auto catalog. I took the precaution of slipping the legal sheets between the pages of the booklet."

"Good, Dick. But supposing the place catches fire?" asked Paul.

"Oh, you've got to take some chances in this world, old man; eh, Grit?" and he patted the head of the bulldog that trotted along with the boys toward the village.

The boys found the town to be a picturesque one, well worth visiting, and there was a good restaurant in it. There they got a meal, sort of half-way between dinner and supper, and they arranged to come back later for something to eat before turning in on the bunks of the auto.

"And there's a moving picture show in town," exclaimed Innis, as they were walking back to the garage. "I vote we take that in."

"All right," assented Dick. "It will relieve the monotony if we have to lay over here two days."

The owner of the garage readily gave the boys permission to occupy their car while it was in his establishment, and the lads made a change of clothes, for they were rather disheveled by the work of getting the auto out of the creek.

Shortly before dusk they made their way to the village again, and after a good supper they headed for the moving picture theatre.

In spite of the small size of the town, the exhibition was a good one. It was interspersed with vaudeville acts, and as this happened to be "amateur" night, it was quite late when our friends came out.

"Well, it was pretty good; wasn't it?" remarked Dick, as he linked his arms in those of his chums.

"Not half bad—for a change," assented Innis. "What's the game for to-morrow?"

"Oh, we'll have to hang over here, I guess. But I understand there's a baseball game between two country nines and we can take that in. It will be sport."

"That's the cheese!" exclaimed Paul.

They were in the midst of the crowd that had thronged from the moving picture show. A number of pretty girls were bunched together, and from their midst came voices that could be heard to remark about the identity of our heroes, as the youths were spoken of as "the millionaire autoists."

"We're getting a reputation already," whispered Innis.

"That's Dick's fault," said Paul.

"I haven't said a word," retorted that youth. "You fellows must have been talking."

Gradually the crowd thinned out, and the three chums found themselves walking along a rather

dark country road toward the garage where the *Last Word* had been left.

For a while they talked among themselves of the adventures of the day, and then a silence settled down. They were all tired and anxious to get to bed.

"Is that some one ahead of us, or behind us?" suddenly asked Dick, coming to a halt.

"I don't hear anything," said Innis.

"Me either," added Paul.

"Walk on a bit and then listen," suggested Dick.

"There is some one sort of keeping time to our footsteps, fellows," spoke Paul a little later.

"But are they ahead or behind us?" asked Dick. "I've been hearing it for some time."

"Ahead of us," said Innis.

"Behind," was Paul's opinion.

The three came to a halt in the roadway and listened. This time, instead of the footsteps becoming silent, they were more plain.

"They're coming," whispered Paul.

A voice hailed them from the darkness.

"Say, is this the road to Centreville?"

"No, you're going the wrong way," replied Dick. "Centreville is behind you."

"Huh! That's funny!" some one remarked. "We must be all twisted up. Wait a second, will you," and from the darkness could be heard footsteps quickly approaching.

CHAPTER XXV

INTO THE LONELINESS

"HAVE you the time?"

It was the voice of one of those who were approaching our hero and his two chums, they having come to a halt at the request for information.

"Oh, what does it matter?" some one else asked, and then Dick could see that three men were hurrying toward them out of the darkness.

"I just wanted to see how late it was," went on the one who had apparently spoken first. "Sorry to trouble you," he added, "but we're strangers here, and we seem to have lost our way."

"It's no trouble—if we can direct you," said the young millionaire. "We're strangers here ourselves."

"It's a little after eleven," announced Paul, looking at his watch as well as he could by the starlight. As he spoke one of the men made a sudden motion toward him.

"Not him! The other!" some one exclaimed sharply.

Before the three knew what was happening they were seized by the three men—seized and roughly mauled.

"Here! What does this mean?" demanded Dick, hotly, as he struck out vigorously.

"It's a hold-up!" yelled Innis. "Lay into 'em, fellows!"

"Let go of me!" insisted Paul, as he swung himself loose from his antagonist and dealt him a stinging blow that staggered the fellow.

The man, with a smothered exclamation, recovered himself, and rushed back at Paul. In the meanwhile Innis and his asasilant were having a tussle. As for Dick, after that first outcry, he had held his voice, but he was struggling desperately with the man in the darkness. He could feel hands moving over his body, inserting themselves in his various pockets.

"They're thieves!" he cried. "Help! Help!"

There was no answer save the echo of his own voice, broken by the panting breaths of the three men, who seemed to want to do their work in silence.

By a powerful right-hand swing Paul sent his man to the ground with a thud that knocked the breath from his body, and the fellow did not get up again immediately.

"Let go of me!" yelled Innis. "Keep your hands out of my pockets!"

He tore himself loose from the man's grip, and shoved the fellow aside, so that he fell on top of the one Paul had knocked down.

"Help! Help!" yelled Innis. "Thieves! Grit! Grit!"

"Grit isn't here!" panted Dick, wishing with all his heart that his pet had not been left in the garage to keep watch and ward over the auto. Our hero was struggling fiercely with his man.

By this time the one Paul had knocked down was getting up, being assisted by the fellow Innis had pushed from him. Dick managed to get one arm free and he dashed his clenched fist full into the face of his attacker.

He could feel the force of the blow, and he knew he must have caused the footpad considerable pain, for there was a grunt of protest.

"Here they come again!" said Innis, fiercely. "Back to back, fellows, and we can stand 'em off!"

Now that the first instinctive fear at the attack in the dark had passed off, the three youths felt a fierce joy in the coming conflict. It was like a battle on the football gridiron, only with greater odds.

Dick, Paul and Innis moved close together, being free for the moment from their assailants. Then from down the road could be heard the sound of footsteps running rapidly. The men paused, listened a moment, and then the one who had attacked Dick exclaimed:

"Come on. He hasn't it with him!"

At once the three men turned and raced off in the darkness, away from the sound of the approaching footsteps. For a moment the three

chums remained in a sort of triangular posture of defense, hardly knowing what it was all about, since it had taken place so quickly.

"Are—are we all here?" Dick finally managed to gasp.

"It seems so," replied Paul. "What happened, anyhow? Was it a joke?"

"My nose doesn't feel that way," said Innis.

"No, and I guess I gave one of those fellows something that he'll remember for a day or so," went on Paul. "But what in the world were they after?"

"Something that I left back in the auto," replied Dick, grimly.

"What! Those papers?"

"That's it. The fellow who had me went all through my pockets while he was rough-housing me. First I thought he was after my watch and money, but when he didn't take them, I knew what he wanted."

"They went through my pockets, too," confessed Innis.

"Same here," added Paul.

"Did they get anything?" asked Dick, quickly.

The lads made a hasty search, and both reported that they had lost nothing. At that moment a man came running up.

Instinctively the three chums got ready for a renewal of hostilities, but they soon saw they had nothing to fear, even had not the man spoken, for he was an honest-appearing chap.

"What—what's the matter?" he panted. "Did you call for help?"

"We did," replied Dick, "but we don't need any now; thank you."

"What was it?"

"Somebody tried to hold us up," went on the young millionaire, not caring to go into all the details. "But we beat 'em off."

"That's good. Were they three rough-looking fellows?"

"There were three of 'em, all right," said Paul, "and I guess they're a little more rough-looking than they were at first; eh, boys?"

"Sure thing," remarked Innis, tenderly touching some of his bruises.

"I'm a watchman down the road a ways, at a new building just going up," the man went on. "I saw these fellows go past, and I didn't like their looks and actions. They were talking about getting something off some one, and——"

"I guess they were talking about us," interrupted Dick. "They probably saw us in the moving picture place, and followed us. They asked for the time, and pretended they had missed their way. That was only to get us to halt, of course. But we're well out of it, all right."

"Did they get much?"

"Nothing," said Paul. "We're much obliged to you for coming."

"I came as soon as I heard you call. Oh,

you're the fellows with the big auto; aren't you?" he went on, as he came close and made out the faces of the three in the starlight.

"That's us," said Dick. "I guess we might as well go on, boys," he added to his chums. "I want some arnica for this bump I got."

"Which way did the men go?" the watchman wanted to know, and when the boys had indicated it, and had themselves started to go in the same direction, to reach the garage where the *Last Word* was waiting for them, the watchman went on: "Aren't you afraid they'll tackle you again? They may be waiting down the road for you."

Dick shook his head.

"They found out we didn't have what they wanted," he remarked, "and they won't bother us any more. Come on, boys."

"Huh! Queer robbers," observed the watchman, and he turned away after the boys had thanked him for his prompt response to their calls for help.

"Do you really think those men were after the papers, Dick?" asked Paul.

"I'm sure of it," answered his friend. "It was all part of the game Uncle Ezra is playing, but I'm getting tired of it. This is the limit! It's got to stop!"

"Are you going to tell him so?" asked Innis, as they walked along.

"No, but I'm going to make a change in our plans. We'll fool 'em—we'll get off the beaten

track and go off into the unknown until we put plenty of space behind us. Then they'll have their own troubles tracing us."

"That does seem the best way," assented Paul. "It's no fun to be on the verge of an attack at any time. The game is too one-sided. We'll make it harder for them."

"That's my idea," said Dick, as they neared the garage, having seen no further signs of the three men.

They found the big car undisturbed, with Grit ready to give them a noisy welcome.

"I wish we'd had you along a while ago, old fellow," remarked Dick, as he patted his dog. "I guess those fellows wouldn't have been quite so fresh. But maybe it's just as well as it is, for I wouldn't want any of them chewed up."

"How do you figure it out?" asked Paul, as they got themselves a little lunch before turning in.

"Why, Uncle Ezra, or whoever he's hired to turn this trick, knew where we would be at a certain day, I suppose," said Dick. "The men were on the watch, and, when we arrived, they just kept tabs on us. The rest was easy enough."

"Only you didn't happen to carry the papers with you," added Innis.

"No, it was a good trick to leave 'em here," assented our hero, as he looked in the advertising envelope behind the mirror, to make sure that

the documents were safe. "Well, they won't try it on again in a hurry. In the morning we'll figure out a new route that will bring us to 'Frisco in time to file the papers."

It was no very difficult task, with their road maps, to do this, and having seen the garage man start on the work of repairing the brakes, Dick and his chums strolled into town. They managed to find some points of interest, and also took in the ball game, and, though the repairs took three days, instead of two, they did not regret their little stop-over.

"We've got plenty of time," said Dick, "and from now on we'll shift about on our route. I'm anxious to get out in the West."

"So am I!" added Paul.

Once more they were under way, but they did not head for Chicago, as they had intended.

"Too much is likely to happen there," decided Dick. "We might as well have a brass band with us, as this big car. So the thing to do is to avoid the big cities."

This they did. As events of very little interest occurred during the next week, I shall skim over that period, only saying that the lads had no further trouble, except an occasional bad road to travel, and a storm to journey through.

Farther and farther west they worked their way, until one morning saw them in Salt Lake City, Utah. This was on their original schedule, but Dick and his chums figured that they had

so shifted about that their enemies must have lost their trail by this time.

"Of course they may be waiting for us here," said Dick, "but they won't get much chance at us. We'll keep on the outskirts of town, and after we get what supplies we need we'll strike out into the desert."

"The desert!" exclaimed Paul. "That sounds lonely enough."

"It will be," asserted the young millionaire, "and we'll have to take along an extra amount of water and gasoline. But we'll keep near the line of the Western Pacific railroad, and in case of trouble we can get help."

That afternoon they started off, having stocked the big car well. They made a quick run to the Great Salt Lake, paused to wonder at it, and then headed for the great desert. Off into its loneliness they steered, wondering what lay before them.

CHAPTER XXVI

BAD NEWS

"SAY, it sure is lonesome; isn't it?"

"No mistake about it. If this isn't the jumping-off place, it's next door to it."

"I'd hate to be caught here without water or a means of getting away."

Thus, in turn, Dick, Paul and Innis expressed themselves as they sat in the big car, panting and uncomfortable from the heat of a summer day, making a pretense of eating. It was almost too warm for that, however.

"Well, there's one consolation, we can leave whenever we like," remarked Dick. "I'll start whenever you fellows say so."

"Well, let's get a move on," suggested Paul. "There's a little breeze when we're in motion, but there isn't any now."

They put away the remains of the meal and were soon moving over the great salt desert of Utah, it being their second day on it. They had been delayed by a slight accident or they would have made better time across it.

However, they did not regret the time spent, for it was a new and wonderful experience for them, and one they would long remember.

The big car, aside from the slight break which Dick and his chums had been able to mend themselves, was behaving to perfection. In it they could cross with ease and comparative comfort this terrible stretch of country, where many of the early settlers had given up their lives.

Dick had taken the precaution to put on, over the big cushion tires, a sort of steel-studded leather shoe, which gave a larger surface, so that the wheels would not sink down so far in the sand, for the *Last Word* was of no light weight.

In addition, strips of canvas were carried so that when they came to a particularly sandy place these strips could be laid down, like boards across a mud puddle, and the auto sent over them, turn and turn about. Of course that would be slow progress, but it was better than stalling.

They saw little of other travelers. Occasionally a mule team would be observed, and now and then they came in sight of the railroad, and watched a train dash along it. But, in the main, they picked out their own route, having learned in Salt Lake City of the one most available for autos.

At no time were they very far from the railroad line, but they did not follow it too closely. For, as Dick said, "What was the use of coming out on a tour if you kept in touch with civilization all the while?"

So they broke their own trail as far as was practicable, and enjoyed the experience. Water—

for themselves and the car—was their main worry, but they had a goodly supply with them. To drink Dick had provided several large vacuum bottles of ice-cold lemonade, and, though of course the frigid temperature could not be retained indefinitely, the liquid was still quite cool and refreshing after several hours of bottling.

"Well, this sure has been a great experience for us," declared Paul, as the big car moved off over the desert.

"I should say yes," agreed Dick. "I wouldn't have missed it for a farm."

"Not even with all the trouble Uncle Ezra made?" asked Innis.

"No, even with that. But he hasn't bothered us lately," said our hero, patting Grit, who sat on the seat beside him, Paul driving the car for a change.

"I guess he's lost track of us," suggested Innis. "We haven't had a sight of any of his pesky men since that encounter in the dark."

"No," assented Dick, "but you never can tell where he will crop up. He may be laying low for us. Though I don't expect there'll he any more fighting until it comes time to file those papers. Then he may try to block me in a legal way."

"What can you do?" asked Paul.

"I don't know, until the time comes. Dad told me to wire him in case of trouble, and ask his

advice. Maybe I'll have to depend somewhat on Mr. Ainslie, the California lawyer."

"Say, it seems to me you're going to a lot of trouble to save a fortune for a fellow you don't know very well, and who doesn't seem to take much interest in it himself," observed Innis.

"Who, Wardell?" asked Dick.

"Sure. That's who I mean."

"You don't understand," said the young millionaire, softly. "In the first place, Mr. Wardell would make the biggest kind of a fight for himself, if he were here. But I think he's doing the right thing, to try to start life over again, for there's nothing sure about saving his fortune for him. The courts may decide against him at the last minute. But there's a chance in his favor, and I'm taking it for him.

"Some day Mr. Wardell is going to know that it's my uncle who played him this trick, but if he knows that I did my best to offset it, why, that's going to square it; isn't it?"

"I suppose so," agreed Innis.

"And Wardell is a mighty fine chap," went on Dick. "Of course that day when Paul and I saw him on the railroad bank he had sort of lost his nerve. You can't blame him for that. I'm not a bit sorry over what I'm trying to do for him."

"Oh, no, of course not. Only it's a lot of trouble for a stranger."

"Well, I'm not doing it altogether for him,"

said Dick. "I'm thinking of the honor of our family. I wouldn't want it said that any of my relatives ruined a man, even if it was legal."

"Good for you!" cried Paul. "Say, the trail is leading us back toward the railroad, I think."

"Yes, it does come near the line about here," agreed Dick, as he consulted a map. "So much the better. We may strike a water tank. Our supply isn't any too large."

The big car slowly made its way over the desert. They were not trying for any speed, since the clinging sand made progress difficult, and they did not want to put too much of a strain on the wheels and motor.

It seemed to get hotter as they proceeded, though the breeze of the electric fan in the car was grateful. But even the air in motion seemed to come out of some oven, laden with the smell of baking earth.

"Whew!" exclaimed Paul, when they had gone on about a mile further, and had come in sight of the railroad. "Take her a while, Innis. My hands are tired from trying to hold the wheel steady. She wabbles a lot."

"I'll guide," said Dick.

"No, let me," urged his other chum, so he was given charge.

The *Last Word* ran along well, and they were beginning to think of looking for a good location to spend the night, since it was evident

that they would need another day to cross the desert.

Suddenly Dick, who had been looking ahead, uttered an exclamation, and made a grab for the gasoline lever.

"Stop her!" he cried to Innis. But it was too late. The car sank down several inches into a particularly soft and yielding stretch of sand.

"Wow!" cried Innis, as he saw into what he had steered.

"Never mind," consoled Dick. "It couldn't be helped. I didn't see it in time. I guess we'll have to use the canvas strips to cross this stretch. It's as wide as all get-out, and we might get into something worse if we tried to go around it. Come on, fellows; get busy!"

They leaped out, taking light wooden shovels from the back of the auto, where they had been fastened on purpose to be used on the desert sand. Then the canvas strips were brought into use, Paul and Innis stretching them in front of the wheels, while Dick drove the car over them.

The broad surface of the sail cloth, coupled with the wide tires, served to keep the machine from settling much, but their progress was slow, and after an hour or so of it Dick announced:

"Let's give up until morning. I'm dead tired, and it's too hot to work any more. We'll just camp here, have grub, and go to sleep. There's going to be a moon, and when it comes up we can work in the cool of the night."

"That's the ticket!" exclaimed Innis. "Though don't stop on my account," he urged. "I got you into this hole, and I'll help to get you out."

"You didn't get us in at all," declared Dick. "I'd have run into this soft stretch as soon as you. Knock off and we'll eat."

The rest was welcome. As the sun began to set they looked over toward the distant railroad, the rails of which could be seen glittering in the fading light. Something not far off stirred in a faint breeze.

"What's that?" asked Paul.

"Part of a newspaper," said Dick, as he caught sight of it. "Probably some passenger tossed it out of a car window. I'm going to have a look at it. Maybe it isn't more than a month old, and there'll be something in it to read. The next time I come touring I'm going to bring along part of a library."

He strolled toward the fragment of paper, which was held down by a little mound of shifting sand. Paul and Innis were getting the meal ready. Suddenly they were startled by a cry from Dick. He was staring at the paper.

"What's the matter?" asked Paul.

"Matter, fellows! Look here! If this isn't bad news I don't know what is."

"Somebody dead you know?" inquired Innis.

"No, but this paper is only two days old. It must have been tossed away to-day. And it's

got something in it about that railroad in which Wardell's fortune is tied up."

"What is it?" demanded Paul.

"Why, it says that a new turn has been given the fight for the control of the stock. Instead of waiting until September to settle the case, it's going to be forced to a settlement now. New information has been given that puts an entirely different light on matters, and certain Eastern interests are said to be going to gobble up the whole outfit.

"Fellows, I can see Uncle Ezra's hand in this. He's found out he can't get those papers away from me, and he's going to make them of no use by hurrying this game to a finish before I have time to get to 'Frisco!"

"How's that?" asked Paul.

"Why, the whole thing, according to this paper, is scheduled to be settled a week from to-day."

"You can get to 'Frisco before then!" exclaimed Innis.

"Yes, I know I can, but what good will it do me? I can't file these papers before the date set. You see they've stolen a march on us. Uncle Ezra has had his lawyers act and they've brought matters to a head sooner than was expected.

"These legal papers I have are useless after all our work in saving them, and Wardell's fortune will be lost! Hang it all! Did you ever see such bad luck?" and Dick vigorously shook the newspaper he had picked up on the desert.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE MAN IN THE DESERT

"SAY, Dick," requested Paul, "just calm down a bit, and sort of explain things."

"Yes, he's got me going," added Innis, pausing in the act of frying some eggs for supper.

"Why, it's plain enough," said Dick. "Here is a piece of a San Francisco paper, and it has in it an account of this railroad lawsuit. The case come up in 'Frisco, you know," he added. "The paper was probably tossed out of the car window by some man who got tired of it, and I almost wish I hadn't found it."

"Why?" Paul wanted to know.

"Because it makes me feel bad. To think that all my hard work is thrown away."

"But is it?" asked Innis.

"It looks so. This is how I figure it out. As soon as Uncle Ezra finds out he couldn't block my game to save Mr. Wardell's fortune by getting the legal papers away from me, he starts off on a new tack. He has his lawyers look up other means for getting control of this railroad, and they find one, it seems.

"From what I can gather, by reading this article, a new witness has cropped up. He gave

testimony in court that knocks out Wardell, and makes his claim valueless. Under the new ruling, Uncle Ezra and those associated with him can go ahead and, inside of a week, get possession of the railroad stock so that Mr. Wardell can't redeem it.

"You see, it was this way: This Wardell had this stock left to him by his father. It was worth considerable. In fact, it virtually made him owner of the railroad, though of course he didn't operate it. Then, foolishly, he puts up that stock as security for a loan with Uncle Ezra, and invests the money in something else.

"He loses it—I guess Uncle Ezra intended he should, and of course if he can't pay it back Uncle Ezra will get the railroad. But from what my dad and I understood there was a time limit set by which Wardell would have another show for his white alley—I mean that he'd get a chance to go to court, and say he had been cheated and would like more time to raise the money to buy back his railroad stock.

"That's the plan I've been working on, and that's what these legal papers covered. Now it seems this new witness makes it all look like an ice cream cone on a hot day. Unless the money is paid inside of a week Wardell will forfeit all his stock to Uncle Ezra. Oh, it's a cute game, all right, and there doesn't seem to be any way to beat it," said Dick, bitterly.

"Maybe if we hurried into San Francisco,"

suggested Paul, "and saw this witness, we could explain things to him, and ask him to hold off until Mr. Wardell could get here."

"No chance of that," said Dick. "Wardell is in South America—the land knows where. We can't reach him in time."

"But if we could find this witness," persisted Paul.

"He's disappeared, so this newspaper article says," remarked Dick. "That's another funny part of it. It looks like a hold-off game, spiriting the witness away in that fashion, and yet what can we do? Even if we got to 'Frisco before the end of the week, which we could easily do, by abandoning the car and taking a train, what good would it do? We couldn't offset the testimony of this witness."

"It does look as though we were up against it," assented Paul.

"Good and hard," agreed Dick.

"Well, let's have grub," suggested Innis, practically. "It's almost ready. And maybe after supper we'll find a way out."

But even after the meal, eaten amid the silence of the salt desert, their gloomy thoughts were not dispersed. They sat about, moody and quiet, until Paul, with a sarcastic exclamation, cried out:

"Say, this is the limit. Let's do a song and dance, or something like that."

"There is a phonograph stowed away some-

where among my things," said Dick with a laugh that had no mirth in it.

"Trot it out and give us a tune," urged Innis, and, after a moment's thought, Dick complied. Anything was better than sitting about, thinking gloomy thoughts. And really he felt keenly his failure so unexpectedly disclosed by that stray piece of newspaper.

All his hard work—his skill in keeping the legal documents away from the cunning emissaries of Uncle Ezra—had gone for naught, in case it were true what he had read. And he had no reason to doubt it. The paper was a reliable publication, and the names of lawyers were mentioned who had a national reputation.

Of course, in a measure, it was a case of "high finance," perhaps not strictly moral, but perfectly legal. Certain interests wanted control of the railroad, and even Uncle Ezra might be simply a catspaw in the game.

Yet it seemed certain that unless something were done—some sort of legal protest or injunction entered—the Wardell fortune would be wiped out. And this Dick did not want to see happen.

Paul was at the phonograph, adjusting the mechanism. He had slipped in a record containing "My Old Kentucky Home," and soon its strains were vibrating out on the desert air.

The phonograph was not particularly good, for it was too small to have any sweetness, and yet,

even with that handicap, the boys enjoyed the "canned music," as Dick called it.

As the chorus welled out, they joined in with the voice of the singer coming from the horn.

"'My old Kentucky home—good night!'"

There was a pause, and as the chorus was repeated more softly, the boys lowered their voices. They had sung in the glee club at Kentfield Military Academy, and their tones were true and pure. In the darkness of the starlight night, on that lonely desert, the music seemed to gather strength and sweetness.

Then, as the chorus neared the end, the three chums were startled to hear, off in the distance, another voice joining in with theirs, blending perfectly, in a rich baritone.

They stopped singing, so startled were they, for they thought themselves all alone, and the unseen voice carried the air alone, accompanied only by the phonograph.

Then, as the last echoes died away, Dick Hamilton jumped to his feet and called out:

"Who is there?"

CHAPTER XXVIII

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

For a moment, following Dick's challenge, there was no answer, and then, off in the darkness, beyond the circle of light from the campfire, made of pieces of a broken wagon the boys had found, came a voice, saying:

"I am a stranger in a strange land. Who are you that you make the night melodious with your music and song?"

The boys felt the tension leave them as they heard the note of culture in the voice, for plainly they had to deal with a gentleman of birth and breeding.

"Come on up, and make yourself at home," invited Dick. "Are you lost? Hungry or thirsty, perhaps?"

"Neither one nor the other, may it please you," was the somewhat whimsical retort. "Yet I will join you if only for a little while. Then I must get back, or my guards will be thinking that I have escaped."

"Guards," murmured Paul, in a low voice. "He must be a prisoner—but in this lonely place——"

"I thought we were the only ones here," added Innis.

"Hush! Here he comes!" cautioned our hero.

A man advanced into the glare of the firelight. He was seen to be a young fellow, of about twenty-five perhaps, of rather frail build, dressed in a negligee costume, well suited to that hot climate, and yet his clothing, as Innis instinctively noticed, was well tailored and fitted him perfectly. Innis was more fastidious about his dress than either of his chums, and naturally noticed the garments of others more closely.

"Greeting, fair sirs!" exclaimed the newcomer. "It is very kind of you to extend your hospitality to a stranger, and I thank you. Permit me to make myself known to you. I am Harry Cameron, sometime of San Francisco, at present of the desert waste; an engineer by profession, a dilly-dallier of verse by avocation, and actually in durance vile for the time being. Such is my brief but not unhappy history."

The three chums looked at one another, hardly knowing what to make of their visitor, who took a seat on part of the old broken wagon—a "prairie schooner" of a bygone age—and stretched out his legs in a comfortable attitude, gazing at Dick's party.

"An escaped lunatic," thought Inins, rather thankful that the stranger seemed to be of the mild type.

"Somebody who has been crazed by the heat, perhaps," was Paul's mental comment. Yet he could not account for the freshness of the man's appearance and attire.

"He's stringing us," was Dick's thought. "Well, if he is, I'll give him as good as he sends." Then he spoke:

"We are college professors, searching in the desert for traces of a lost glacier, last reported to be headed for the salt lake. We want to get some specimens of the tail."

The young man started, looked keenly at Dick, and then, with a quizzical smile, remarked:

"You are pleased to joke, I see. I wish I had the chance to accompany you on your search. But it is denied me. Still, lest perchance you think that I, too, am a jester, there is my card," and, with a quick and skillful motion, he scaled a bit of pasteboard over so that it fell exactly on Dick's outstretched leg. "He who sits may read," went on Mr. Cameron.

Dick picked up the card, feeling a little ashamed of his bantering retort. By the light of the fire he read the name as given by their visitor. There was also an address in San Francisco, and, the letters C. E.—denoting his profession.

"I beg your pardon!" exclaimed Dick, quickly. "I—er—I thought——"

"You thought I was stringing you, I guess," interrupted Mr. Cameron, with a smile. "I was not. I'll tell you——"

"I beg your pardon," interrupted Dick. "Let me introduce myself and my friends," and he presented Paul and Innis in turn, and mentioned his own name.

"And the glacier?" asked Mr. Cameron.

"Was a joke, too," said Dick. "We are merely traveling for pleasure. That is our car," and he waved toward where the *Last Word* was fast in the sand. "We ran into a sort of bog hole and decided to wait until morning to extricate ourselves. But where are you staying?" Dick asked, looking around on the sandy waste, now shrouded in darkness.

"Over there," replied Mr. Cameron, with an indefinite wave of his hand in the direction whence he had come. "We are camping out."

"Camping out!" exclaimed Paul. "In this desert?"

"It does seem rather foolish; doesn't it?" asked their visitor. "And the reasons are peculiar. I was thinking so myself as I strolled out after supper, and saw the gleam of your campfire. I wanted to see who else was as foolish as my friends."

"Then you have friends with you?" asked Innis.

"They call themselves such," was the answer, "but I prefer to think of them as my guards."

"Guards!" cried Dick.

"I surprise you, I see. Let me explain why I am out in this sandy waste. I am a lost man!"

and he waved his hand with a gentle air, as though being lost was the most delightful of occupations.

"Lost!" murmured Paul, again wondering whether they did not have an insane man to deal with.

"Legally lost, perhaps I should have said," went on Mr. Cameron. "As you are not likely to interfere with the plans of my—er—friends, and as you will probably never think of the matter again, I shall tell you the circumstances. Particularly as those who call themselves my friends don't want me to.

"I like being different, and doing the unexpected," he continued. "Also because it will give those fellows back there something to worry about, I am going to tell you a secret. I won't even ask you not to repeat it, because I don't see what object you could have in doing so.

"Know, then, that I am sequestered here in this desert in order that I may not jeopardize certain interests in giving testimony in a big lawsuit. I am to be kept out of the way for a certain time, and I am well paid for being lost. I have promised, for a certain stipulated sum, and because of certain representations made to me, not to go back to beloved 'Frisco until after September third.

"Should I go, certain persons who are antagonistic to those who have hired me, might get hold of me, compel me to give certain testimony

in court, and then—as the poet would say—all the fat would be in the fire. So I have to stay here where the other fellows can't find me, and—well, I am as happy as I can be, in such a dog's hole! It is the most out-of-the-way place they could find to conceal me, and yet be within touch of civilization. There you have the story in a nutshell. And when September third comes, I shall hie me back to civilization."

During this recital Dick's wonder had been growing. He could scarcely believe what he heard, and the odd part of it was that it fitted so in with the scheme he had undertaken to help Mr. Wardell.

Paul and Innis also felt a growing wonder, for they knew some of the details of Dick's plan to save the Wardell fortune.

"Now you understand why I am here," went on Mr. Cameron. "There is a water hole about a mile from here, and one of those rare occurrences in the desert, a little oasis of trees, and a hill. There we have made a camp, which not one in a thousand would ever find. We are comfortable enough, in a way, but I lack for society.

"That is why, wandering away, I saw the gleam of your fire, and hearing the music, I could not help but join in. I trust you will pardon me. But when you have with you two men who do nothing all day but smoke cigarettes, and play some mysterious card game known as 'Seven-up,' and whose only conversation seems to be

along the line of said game—why, life gets rather monotonous, you see."

"I should say so," agreed Dick. And then he resolved on a bold plan. Mr. Cameron had revealed something without being asked. Dick was under no promise of silence. And he saw a chance to defeat the enemies of Mr. Wardell.

"Can it be, by any chance, Mr. Cameron," the young millionaire asked, "that your case has any connection with the Citrous Junction Railway?"

"It has!" cried the engineer, springing to his feet. "But how did you guess it? I never mentioned it—I was careful about that."

"No, you did not," agreed Dick, "but your mention of the date—September third—gave me the clue."

"You are looking for clues, then?"

"In a way, yes. I am seeking some means of getting back to Mr. Wardell the control of the railroad that is about to be taken from him. I was on my way to San Francisco to file a certain paper before September third—the date you mentioned. By the merest accident, happening to pick up a newspaper, probably tossed from a train, I learned that my efforts would be of no avail, because of testimony given by a new witness. And you——"

"I am that witness!" cried Mr. Cameron. "Great Scott! but this is queer. To think of me telling the secret to some one—in all the world—who knew the other half of it. It's as-

tounding! May I ask how you figure in it?"

"Because my uncle, Mr. Ezra Larabee, is the man who is trying to get Mr. Wardell's fortune, and, for the honor of the family, I am trying to prevent him."

"You Ezra Larabee's nephew! Well, of all things in the world that I should meet you here! Why, young man, Ezra Larabee—or, rather, his agent—is paying me to remain away so that the other side can't get hold of me. For, you must know that Mr. Wardell does not own all the stock in the railroad. There are some minor shareholders, and it is they who are trying to get me to go to court on their behalf. But I have accepted money from Mr. Larabee, and, as far as I know, he is in the right. I cannot go back on him, merely because you happen to be for the other side.

"And so you are Larabee's nephew. You don't look much like him, which is a consolation."

"Have you seen him?" asked Dick.

"He came to 'Frisco to see me," explained Mr. Cameron. "He made a flying trip, and hurried back so as to save the other half of his excursion ticket, which was limited."

"That's like him," laughed Dick.

"It seems so. Well, he made certain representations, and it seemed that he was in the right. He hired me to disappear, and so you behold—a lost man."

Dick thought for a moment.

"Would you mind telling me," he said, "just what your testimony consists of?"

"Well, since you know so much, perhaps it can do no harm to tell you more. I am, as I said, a civil engineer. When this contest over the railroad came up, I was engaged to make certain maps and copies of records. It seems that the Citrous Junction is a short line, connecting two important trunk lines in a well-known orange region. That is what gives it its importance.

"Accidentally, while going over some old records, I came across some papers that changed the whole situation. I am not enough of a lawyer to know just how, except that if the papers were produced in court this Mr. Wardell and the other stockholders, no matter what was done by the other side, would get their rights. Mr. Larabee and his crowd could not keep them from so doing.

"I showed to those who had hired me the papers I had found, and at once there was a great how-de-do. It was plainly seen that if they were allowed to get into court your uncle's case would be knocked higher than Gilderoy's kite, even if Wardell did not file certain papers which, I understand, could, at one time, have been filed.

"Your uncle and his lawyers determined on a bold move. They had me give certain testimony that would knock out the other side if they should file certain papers, and then they had me

disappear, so I could not be brought into court to give the rest of my evidence and tell of the old document I had accidentally discovered. So I agreed to come to this lonely place, to live until after September third. After that date nothing Wardell can do will save the railroad for himself and the others associated with him."

"And you agreed to do this?" asked Dick, bitterly. "You consented to see a man cheated out of his fortune?"

"Not at all," said Mr. Cameron, calmly. "As it was represented to me this Mr. Wardell tried to do others out of their holdings, and he got caught at his own game. That is why I agreed to do something that, while perfectly legal, might be considered a trick. I did it to help out your Uncle Ezra."

"If I were to show you," went on our hero, "that matters had been misrepresented to you, and that you were doing Mr. Wardell a grave injustice, what would you do?"

"Misrepresented!" cried Mr. Cameron. "If you can prove to me that they've been fooling me—telling me things that aren't so—for the purpose of keeping me out of court, why, Dick Hamilton, I'll go back to San Francisco to-morrow and rip their case apart in the highest court in the land! That's what I'll do!" and he leaped to his feet at the words.

"Then," said Dick, quietly, "that is just what I am going to prove to you!"

CHAPTER XXIX

ON TO 'FRISCO

THE young millionaire started for the auto that was stalled in the sand. He intended to get from it the bundle of legal papers and prove to Mr. Cameron the statement just made about misrepresentation. But before he reached the *Last Word* he heard the sound of some one coming toward the fire. And out of the desert darkness a voice hailed, saying:

"Hello there, Mr. Cameron! We were looking all over for you."

"I'm here," said the young man, quickly. "Enjoying myself. Won't you come up and meet my new friends?" Then to Paul, who sat near him, he said in low tones:

"My guards—as I call them! Say nothing of this, and warn young Hamilton. I will see you to-morrow."

"Wait a minute, Dick!" called Paul, as he glided off in the gloom toward the car which Dick was approaching.

"We thought you were lost," went on one of the two men who had come up. "Lost in the desert, Mr. Cameron."

"Oh, no," he answered, lightly. "I was just strolling along, and I came to the concert."

"Concert!" exclaimed the other man. "Is that another of your jokes?" from which it would appear that Mr. Cameron was in the habit of indulging in persiflage.

"Not at all," was the answer. "Boys, will you start up the phonograph again for my friends?"

"Phonograph—out here in this desert!" exclaimed one of the two newcomers. "Say, that sounds like 'Frisco. Can you give us some ragtime?"

"We haven't a very choice selection of records," spoke Innis, Paul and Dick being engaged in a whispered conversation near the car. "I'll play what we've got," and he started toward the car. "I'll have to get another record from the the machine," he added.

"Machine!" exclaimed one of the men. "Have you an auto here, too?"

"A big car," said Mr. Cameron. "It could swallow our modest six-cylinder, from the looks of it."

"Oh, then you also came in an auto?" asked Dick of the engineer, who, with Paul, had come back to the fire.

"Yes, I believe I forgot to mention that," said Mr. Cameron. "We escaped into the desert in a gasoline chariot, unlike the Children of Israel, who walked."

"Mr. Cameron!" exclaimed one of the men, "I—ahem—I hope you'll excuse me mentioning it, but you know you promised not to do too much talking. It was the agreement——"

"There are agreements—and agreements," said the young engineer, with peculiar emphasis. "You need have no fear of me, Sam Martin. And, while I am about it, let me present to you my new friends. Boys, these are Sam Martin and Bill Wickford, my—er—my camp-mates," and he named the three chums in turn.

"Pleased to see you," said Sam, with a jerky bow. "Mr. Cameron is camping out here for—er—for his health. Bill and I are running things for him. It's no fun to be in the desert alone."

"That's right," chimed in Bill. "Have you got any ragtime?" he asked, as Innis came back with a record.

Then the phonograph was played again, sounding strangely in that lonely desert. Mr. Cameron seemed at his ease, but the two men were plainly nervous, and Dick was much excited, though he tried not to show it. He had heard what Paul said, and refrained from bringing out any of the papers.

"That's fine!" exclaimed Bill Wickford, as the tune came to an end. "I wish we had one of those at our camp."

"It might interfere with the seven-up tournament," observed Mr. Cameron, drily.

"Oh, we'd have time for that," said Sam.

"But I guess we'd better be getting back. It's late."

"Don't be in a hurry," urged Dick, hospitably.

"Well, we may be over to see you again. We didn't know we had any neighbors so close by."

"You might come over and see us," added Bill, somewhat awkwardly. "We can't offer you much in the way of entertainment, but we'll do our best."

"Thanks," answered Dick. "We may come, but we're going to pull out of this to-morrow, I hope. As soon as we can get out of this sand bog we'll travel."

"We struck one of those places," volunteered Sam, "and we had quite a time of it. Well, so-long," and he and his companion seemed to hover around Mr. Cameron as though they were afraid he would let out something of the secret that had already been told, had they only known it.

Good-nights were said, and the three disappeared in the darkness. The chums stood for a moment silent about their dying camp fire.

"Well, what do you know about that?" asked Paul.

"It's a queer go," assented Innis.

"Those men are just like guards," said Dick. "Uncle Ezra, or his agents, must be afraid Mr. Cameron will go back on his promise."

"If it was a promise given under misrepresentation then he is released from it—that holds in law," said Paul.

"I believe it does," agreed our hero. "I hope I get a chance to speak to him to-morrow. The idea of hiding him away out in this desert to prevent him from going to court. It's outrageous."

"Do you think he'll testify for Mr. Wardell if you show him the facts?" asked Paul.

"I sure do. Well, let's turn in. To-morrow will be another day. There's a lot of hard work ahead of us."

They were up early the next morning, the night having passed without incident, though Grit growled several times as though intruders—human or otherwise—were about the camp. But he gave no decided alarm, and the boys did not pay much attention.

Soon after breakfast they resumed work on getting the auto out of the clinging sand, by using the canvas strips. While they were engaged on this, Mr. Cameron and his two guards came up.

"We came to see if we could help you any," he said, with a wink. "At the same time I'd like to get a look at your car." He passed close to Dick, and found a chance to whisper: "Where are the papers?"

"In the old envelope, back of the mirror," replied Dick in the same low voice. Then, in

louder tones, he added: "We'd be glad of some help. It's hard work."

"Sam, and Bill, don't you want to get busy?" went on the young engineer.

"Sure!" said Sam. In fact, he and his companion seemed anxious to get the three boys away from the vicinity. The men helped spread and fasten down the canvas strips, and as Dick got in the car to drive it forward, he saw Mr. Cameron looking over the legal papers that proved how he had been deceived.

"By Jove, Hamilton!" he exclaimed, "you were right. They have put up a great game on me."

"Then will you turn them down?"

"I certainly will. I'm on your side from now on. I didn't understand it. These papers make it plain." He and Dick could talk without being regarded suspiciously, since the two men were working with Paul and Innis, spreading the strips of canvas.

Once or twice the two men looked at the car, as though wondering why Mr. Cameron was riding in it. He guessed their thoughts, and, putting back the papers, said to Dick:

"You may not need these, with my testimony. Still, keep them safe. Now I'd better leave you. Those fellows are paid to watch me as a cat does a mouse. How can I get away and reach 'Frisco?"

"We'll take you," said Dick, promptly.

"We've accommodations for four in this car. Can you manage to escape?"

"Yes, and it had better be to-night. There is a gully about a mile from here, near a dried water hole. You'll get to it if you keep straight on. Can you wait for me there?"

"Yes," said Dick, quickly.

"Then I won't say any more. Here comes Sam. I guess he's getting suspicious." As Mr. Cameron left the car, which Dick had stopped to allow him to alight, the engineer added in louder tones: "You certainly have a fine machine there, Mr. Hamilton. I envy you. Now I'll give you a hand in getting under way again. Perhaps I may see you some day in 'Frisco."

The canvas strips proved just the thing needed, and after about an hour's work the *Last Word* was on firmer ground. Then, bidding their new acquaintances good-bye, during which farewells Dick winked at Mr. Cameron, to indicate that the arrangements made would be carried out, the big car was sent on over the desert. The two men seemed much relieved as it went off.

Dick easily found the gully Mr. Cameron had referred to. Driving several miles past it, to throw off suspicion in case they were followed, the young millionaire came to a halt.

"We'll wait here until night," he said, making his chums acquainted with the plan to be followed.

The boys thought night would never come, but

it did finally, and carefully they ran their car back nearly to the dry gully. Then, stopping at a safe distance, Dick went back to hold the rendezvous with Mr. Cameron.

An hour passed, and Dick was beginning to think that perhaps the plan had failed, when he heard a cautious whistle. It was a strain from "My Old Kentucky Home." He answered in like manner, and then a voice called:

"Here I am. But we'd better be quick. They may follow me as they did last night."

"Come on," urged Dick. They went back toward the car on the run. It was the work of but a moment to start it, and with four passengers now, instead of three, the *Last Word* shot over the desert in the darkness, no lights being set aglow, as they wanted to remain concealed for some time yet. They were on their way to 'Frisco, and with a better chance of saving Mr. Wardell's fortune than Dick had imagined could be had, following the revelation in that stray newspaper.

CHATER XXX

PURSUED

"WELL, we got away in good shape!"

"We sure did; and fooled those fellows."

Thus spoke Paul and Innis.

"I'll show you that my car can go some, Mr. Cameron," said Dick, as he turned on more power.

"It may need to," answered the engineer.

"Why so?"

"Sam and Bill aren't going to give up so easily. And they have a speedy machine."

"You mean they may follow us?"

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised if they did. You know they were paid to see that no hostile interests got at me."

"And we might be regarded as 'hostile interests'; is that it?" inquired Dick, with a smile.

"Somewhat; yes. So put as many miles between them and us as you can. They're sure to discover, sooner or later, that I have gone, and they'll pursue us. But I think I put one over on them at that."

"How?" asked Paul, from the rear of the car, for Dick was driving.

"I poured water in the gasoline tank. They may be able to run for a few miles, but they're sure to stall sooner or later."

"Then there's no use in worrying," said our hero, and he had almost slowed down his car, when Mr. Cameron said:

"Don't bank too much on that. They carry an extra supply of the 'gas,' and they're sure to find out, in a little while, what the trouble is. They're both experts, and they were sent off with me on that account. Also, your Uncle Ezra's agents considered that it might be necessary for me to make a quick shift, so they provided a powerful car, and plenty of gasoline, though he did object most strenuously to the price."

"I can imagine him doing that," agreed Dick, with a laugh. "Well, then, we'll keep on for a while longer, and remain dark. It won't be so easy for them to trace us then, as this car makes very little noise for its size."

"I noticed that," said Mr. Cameron.

On they shot, over the desert. It was about an hour since they had left the dry gully where they had picked up the young engineer, and they had covered several miles.

Once Dick halted his machine, while they listened for any sounds of pursuit, but they heard none. If the other car was coming after them it was either following silently, or was so far back that no sound of its motor carried over the desert.

"And so you put water in their gasoline tank?" chuckled Dick, as he recalled what his guest had said.

"Yes, they were both playing 'seven-up,' and disputing over some intricate point, when I just took one of the water cans, and emptied it into the gas tank. I thought I ought to do something after their having taken most of the tricks so far."

"That was all right!" rejoined Dick. "I'd like to see them when they stall."

"Well, really I owed them something like that," went on the young engineer. "They had things their own way long enough. To think how I let them fool me makes me mad! And yet I believed what they told me—that they were in the right—I mean your Uncle Ezra and his friends—and of course as long as I was paid for my legitimate work, I saw nothing wrong in not coming to court to testify, particularly when they said that the other side had been guilty of the same kind of practice.

"But I see their game now. They thought I would never hear the other side. It was the luckiest thing in the world that I stumbled into your camp last night. It was fate. Do you believe in fate?" he asked Dick.

"I certainly do," answered that young man. "That is why I stuck those valuable papers—at least, they were valuable at one time—back of that glass where anyone could see them," and he

told of the experiences he and his chums had gone through.

In turn Mr. Cameron related some of his life's story. He was all alone in the world, having been left a small inheritance by his father. He took up the study of civil engineering, and made a success of it.

It was by accident that he had been hired by Mr. Larabee's agents to make the survey, and the rest followed by a "trick of fate," as he described it.

"I needed the money they promised to give me," he said, "or perhaps I should not have gone into the matter at all. I am intending to set up in business for myself, and the amount the lawyer named was very acceptable. I never stopped to think that I might be doing some one an injustice. The fact of the matter is, that I thought the trickery was on Wardell's side."

"I hope you are convinced now that it was not," said Dick.

"I am, perfectly. I think your Uncle Ezra, not to put too fine a point upon it, as the celebrated Mr. Snagsby would say—I think your Uncle Ezra rather put one over on me."

"I believe he did," said Dick, "and I'm glad I can be the means of correcting the wrong."

"And what will Uncle Ezra say when he finds it out?" asked Paul, with a chuckle.

"I'm afraid," answered the young millionaire, "that he'll have a fit; won't he, Grit?"

The animal growled, as he nearly always did

at the mention of Mr. Larabee's name. Grit and Mr. Cameron, however, had made friends at once.

They drove on for a few miles farther, stopping now and then to listen for sounds of an auto coming after them, but they heard nothing. Then, as the way was getting rough, Dick decided to light the lamps, since it was hardly possible now for the two men to see them over the desert.

A short halt was made for this purpose, and then they got under way again. There was the coming of a pale light in the east, and Dick, looking toward it, said:

"The sun will soon be up. We'll keep on as far as we can in the cool of the day, and then halt in the best place we can find, for the engine easily gets overheated on this sandy desert. After rest, and a breakfast, we'll keep on."

All thought this was a good plan, and it was followed. They had put many miles between themselves and the two men when they slackened speed for the morning meal. The sun seemed to come up with a "pop" from the sandy waste, and immediately it was warm.

"Thank goodness we haven't much more of this desert," said Dick, as he helped his chums to prepare breakfast. "We can make better time when we get on harder ground."

"Are you going right into 'Frisco?" asked Innis.

"As straight as I can," answered Dick. "I don't want to run any more chances than I have

to, and there's no telling what the other fellows may do when they find that Mr. Cameron has deserted them."

"Would they telegraph in to the lawyers?" asked Paul.

"Very likely they would."

"Then they may be waiting for us when we arrive," said Dick. "We'll have to be careful."

"I agree with you," spoke Mr. Cameron. "Once they know I have gone over to the other side—the right side—they will do their best to discredit me. They may even cause my arrest on some trumped-up charge, to prevent me from going into court and giving my evidence to save Mr. Wardell's fortune."

"Then we'll be careful that they don't get you," said Dick, with a laugh. "I'll have some more coffee, Paul."

They were putting away the breakfast things, playfully scattering the wooden plates over the sand, when Innis, who had gone to the rear of the car, to look at the brake band, that needed a slight adjusting, called out:

"I say, Dick, they're after us!"

"Who?"

"Mr. Cameron's guards. There's a car coming over the desert behind us."

They all ran to look, and there, in the distance, could be seen a cloud of dust.

"Maybe it's a stage coach," suggested Paul.

Dick focussed a pair of field glasses on the cloud. Then he exclaimed:

"It's an auto, all right, and it must be after us, though I can't make out the kind of a car it is. Still, we'll take no chances. Come on, fellows, let's get a move on!"

They tumbled into the *Last Word* and were soon speeding off over the sand.

"Lucky there isn't much more of this," said Paul. "We can't make any time here."

"And if we don't run into another sand-bog we'll be lucky," added Innis.

"We simply mustn't do that," declared Dick. "You fellows watch out, and so will I. We don't want to be delayed, for they would catch up to us then."

"They'll have hard work to get me to go back with them," spoke Mr. Cameron, grimly .

"Well, we don't want a fight if we can help it," said our hero. "If we can beat them, so much the better," and he glanced back to where the other auto was coming on in pursuit of the big car. Then Dick turned on more power, and watched the road ahead keenly. He wanted no accidents now.

But the auto behind was coming on swiftly . It was a powerful car, and was traveling light, while the *Last Word* carried a heavy load.

"But they sha'n't catch us!" murmured Dick.

From behind there sounded a report like that of a gun.

"A blow-out!" cried Paul.

"No, they're trying to signal us—with revolvers," said Mr. Cameron, with a chuckle.

CHAPTER XXXI

A BREAKDOWN

EACH one of Dick's chums said, afterward, that he thought the same thing at the moment Mr. Cameron made his statement—that the affair was more desperate than they had at first suspected. True, the men racing after them in the swift car might only be trying to attract their attention by the firing of revolver shots, but, knowing what he did, Dick was more inclined to think that it was done with the intention of injuring some one.

"Do you really think they're shooting at us?" asked Innis.

"Well, not so much at us, as at our car," said the young engineer.

"The tires!" cried Paul, with sudden thought.

"What kind have you?" asked Mr. Cameron.

"Not pneumatic!" exclaimed Dick, as he put on a little more power. "Cushions instead. It won't hurt them to get a few bullets inside."

"Good! For I think that's their intention," went on Mr. Cameron. "They're not in effective range yet, though. But they think they can disable us, and then get me back in their control again. They're going to have their own troubles

doing that though!" and he shut his teeth grimly. His former light-hearted manner seemed to have left him.

Paul took a backward glance at the oncoming car. Behind it there floated a little haze of smoke from the firing of the revolver.

"They're coming on," murmured the youth. "Can you get any more speed up, Dick?"

"I think so. I'm sort of doing it gradually, though, for this going is hard on the running gear, and I don't want a breakdown."

The *Last Word* responded well to the demand made on her for increased speed. Faster and faster she raced over the sandy stretch of the desert, and now, Innis, looking back, reported:

"We're giving them the go-by, Dick, old man!"

"Glad of it. I thought we would. I have something left in reserve, too. I guess we'll make a get-away, all right."

"That water in the gasoline ought to work pretty soon, I should think," said Mr. Cameron. "They must have used up all that was in the feed pipe and carbureter, and the small auxiliary tank."

"I guess that's what's the trouble now, all right!" went on Innis. "See, they have stopped."

"Then they're stuck!" cried the engineer, joyfully. "It's all right, boys. They won't be able to find out what's the matter for an hour or more.

They'll tinker with every part of the engine, and when they do find it's the gas we'll be far enough off."

"That's right," agreed Dick. "It was a good thing to do."

"The nerve of them, though—firing at us!" exclaimed Paul. "They might have hit one of us."

"I don't believe they would have done so intentionally," spoke the engineer. "The men are not as desperate as that. But the bullets might have glanced off. I imagine they fired low, just at the tires. But they had nerve even to chase after us, as if I were an escaping criminal."

"Do you think they had orders to prevent you from going away?" asked Dick.

"I believe they did," was the answer, "and to use force, if necessary. I didn't realize it before, but those men, including your Uncle Ezra, Mr. Hamilton, are probably desperate at the fear of losing control of this road. It means a big thing to them, and they want to beat Mr. Wardell if possible. But they shan't, if I can prevent it."

Dick, now that he realized that the chase was over for the time being, slowed up his car. They looked back along the level desert road, and saw, in the dim distance, the two men busy about their stalled machine.

"That will hold them for a while," said Mr.

Cameron. "Now we can take our time about getting away."

Four hours later they had reached the end of the desert and had passed into Nevada.

"Into civilization once more," remarked Paul, as they saw the different nature of the country before them.

"And I'm glad of it," exclaimed Dick. "I've had enough of desert travel for a while."

"What is your programme?" asked Mr. Cameron, as they came to a pleasant place, where Dick decided they would stay for the night. It was sufficiently far from the main road to preclude the possibility of their pursuers finding them, even should they be able to get under way again. And that part of Nevada was not thickly populated.

"I think we'll head for Carson City," said our hero. "It will be the most direct route to reach San Francisco, and now that the matter of filing the papers within a certain date isn't so important, I want to get to the court as soon as possible."

"That's right," agreed the young engineer. "As soon as I can make affidavit to what I know your friend Wardell will be safe. Then it will be a matter of fighting it out legally, but he'll have a chance for his white alley, as the boys say. It won't be all one-sided. He'll have an opportunity to put his side of the case in, and I think the courts will restore his fortune to him. I'll do all I can for him, anyhow."

"That's very good of you," said Dick.

"Not at all. It's up to me to do that much, especially after what I did to knock him out—though I didn't mean to, and it was because I was deceived. I'll have a talk with your uncle, when I see him, Dick Hamilton," he added significantly.

"I don't imagine Uncle Ezra will show up around these parts, once he knows he is likely to be defeated," said the young millionaire, with a smile.

"He'll rather have it in for you; won't he, Dick?" asked Paul, as he patted Grit on the head.

"Well, he may," Dick admitted, with a peculiar smile; "but I'm not as afraid of my uncle as I used to be. I may tell him some things, too, the way I did when he tried to kidnap me."

"How was that?" asked Mr. Cameron, interestedly.

"Oh, when I went on a cruise in my ship," answered the owner of the *Last Word,* and he related the main incidents as I have set them down in "Dick Hamilton's Steam Yacht."

"He's as bold as an old-fashioned pirate—your uncle," remarked the young engineer when Dick had finished. "But, say, this is something like living!" he exclaimed, as he saw the preparations under way for getting a meal. "I'm glad I eloped with you boys. Can I help at anything?"

"You might see if you can get some water," suggested Dick. "That in the tanks is a bit stale, I fancy."

Soon they were merrily eating, and talking over their plans for the next few days. They slept that night in the auto, and in the morning were off again, no signs of their pursuers having been seen.

In due time they reached Carson City, and laid in a supply of food and gasoline. Then they hurried onward again. The road was fine in some places, and miserable in others, but they made fairly good time.

They were in California now, and the end of their journey was almost in sight. They might have taken a train, and gotten to San Francisco sooner, perhaps, and very likely it would have been safer to do so, considering the risks they ran. But if this occurred to them they did not give it a second thought.

Besides, Dick did not want to abandon his car, and he had a sort of pride in sticking to it throughout the whole journey across the continent.

True, Mr. Cameron might have gone on by himself, but when Dick suggested this the engineer said:

"No, I'm going to stick by the ship. I don't believe those fellows can get ahead of us. Anyhow, I want your testimony, Dick, to go in with mine. Besides, I hold the trump cards, so to

speak. They can't do anything without me, and the evidence I will give is the most important in the case.

"Another thing, I feel as if I needed protection, and you boys can provide it. If I started for 'Frisco all alone they might get hold of me somehow, and keep me out of the way until it was too late to do anything. So I'll just stick with you. Four are harder to handle than one, as they'll find if they come any of their funny tricks on us."

"That's right!" agreed Paul, while Innis clenched his fists suggestively.

The way was rougher now, and they were proceeding more slowly. The trip across the desert had somewhat delayed them, for the heavy car sank deeper into the sand than they had counted on, and the trip had consumed nearly three times as much time as it ordinarily does.

They were within a few hours' run of Sacramento, passing through a rather lonely region, when Dick, who was at the wheel, leaned forward, and through the open front windows of the car seemed to be listening to the chug-chug of the motor.

"What's the matter?" asked Paul.

"She doesn't seem to be running just right," he answered. "Something seems to be out of gear. Maybe it's one of the timers. I guess I'll have a look."

As he put out his hand to shut off the gasoline

by the lever provided for that purpose, the big car came to a sudden stop of its own accord.

"A breakdown, I guess," murmured Dick. "And a bad place to have it in," he added as he looked about him. As he alighted, followed by the others, there came up behind them a powerful auto containing three men. This car stopped, and two of the strangers got out, approaching Dick and his friends.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE RACE

"SOMETHING gone wrong?" asked one of the men, pleasantly, while the third member of the trio was getting out of the powerful car that had pulled up back of Dick's.

"Yes, the motor stopped without any reason, as far as I can see," said our hero. He gave a hasty glance at the men. As far as he could tell he had never seen any of them before. A look at Mr. Cameron showed that he was not perturbed at their arrival, for he was looking at some queer rocks at the side of the roadway.

"Perhaps I can be of some service," said another of the trio. "I know something of autos."

"We'll take a look," agreed Dick, as he opened the bonnet over the motor. "It's the first time it's gone back on me since I had it, except for a little brake trouble," he went on.

"It's a mighty fine car," said the stranger. "I don't know as I ever saw one like it."

"She was built to order," said Dick, not caring to go into details. Yet he had no intention

of concealing anything, for he realized that their enemies, if they desired to keep track of their progress, could do so anyhow, since the car was not one to be easily forgotten.

While Dick and the man who had admitted that he was something of an auto expert, were going over the motor, looking for the trouble, the other two strangers had gone back to their car.

"Want any help?" asked Paul, as he and Innis strolled about.

"I guess not," said Dick. "Make yourselves comfortable. We'll start as soon as we can."

Mr. Cameron was walking idly about, examining different geological specimens. Then the two men who had gone back to their car discovered that one of the tires had a puncture, and was down almost flat. They called this information to the one who was with Dick, and the latter answered:

"Better put in a new inner tube. We'll want to make time when we get away from here."

"Don't let me keep you," said Dick, quickly. "I think I may be able to locate the trouble myself."

"Well, I am in something of a hurry," the man admitted. "But, since my own car needs attention I'll stay with you until they get the tire fixed. Have you looked at the carbureter?"

"No, I was just going to."

Together they inspected that important part of

an auto's mechanism. They found it a little out of adjustment, and proceeded to remedy it.

"I imagine the trouble, as much as anything, is in the gasoline," said the stranger. "It's an awful poor quality they supply nowadays. It'll get so, after a while, that we'll have to use kerosene. In fact, I'm thinking of getting a car that has a two-jet carbureter on it, to mingle gasoline and kerosene. That's what we'll come to, after a while."

He and Dick talked interestedly of the mechanical side of autos, while the carbureter was put in shape for a test. Meanwhile the two men were working away at their tire. They seemed to be having trouble with it, and Paul and Innis were just going to ask if they did not want some help in return for the service their friend was rendering Dick, when Mr. Cameron exclaimed:

"I'll lend 'em a hand. I want to learn how to change a tire. I may have an auto of my own some day."

With the three of them at work, the tire was soon in shape and pumped up. But Dick's car would not respond. The self-starter was tried again and again, but, though the motor flywheel was turned over rapidly, the cylinders would not take up their work.

"She doesn't seem to be getting a spark," said the man. "How is your magneto?"

"It never has been out of order," said Dick. "Still, there is always a first time."

"Let's have a look at that," the stranger suggested, and he and Dick went around on the other side of the car where the electrical mechanism was located under the bonnet.

As they reached it there came from the other car the staccato sound of the exhaust. One of the men had started it going.

"Now don't let me keep you!" exclaimed Dick. "It's getting late, and we can bunk here all night if we have to. You can't."

"No, that's where you have the advantage of us. But I'll just have a look at your magneto, and then I'm afraid I'll have to be getting on. I'll be with you in a minute!" he called to his two friends. "Are you ready to start?"

"We will be in a minute," came back the answer. Mr. Cameron was standing near the machine, while Paul and Innis had strolled over to a spring and were drinking.

Suddenly, as Dick looked, he saw one of the men at the other auto make a jump for Mr. Cameron. The latter leaped back, but not in time to avoid being caught. The young millionaire had a glimpse of a white cloth being pressed over his friend's face, and a moment later the two men had lifted him into the tonneau. Then, while one held the struggling engineer there, the other leaped to the steering wheel.

"Come on!" he cried, evidently to the man with Dick. "We're ready now!"

"Good!" and with that the third man raced

from Dick's side and the next instant was in the moving auto. A moment later it passed Dick's car with a burst of speed, and went down the road in a cloud of dust, bearing off Mr. Cameron.

For a moment Dick could not find his voice. Then as the significance of what had occurred dawned on him he cried out:

"Paul—Innis! They've got Mr. Cameron! It was a trick! Those are some of Uncle Ezra's agents! They're going to get Mr. Cameron out of the way and spoil our case. Come on!"

The two cadets came running back, surprise showing on their faces.

"We've got to get him back!" cried Dick.

"But how can you, with our car stalled?" asked Paul.

The young millionaire made a gesture of despair. Then with a last hope he sprang to the steering wheel and pressed the button of the self-starter.

With a whizz and a roar the motor began running. By some trick Dick and the man had remedied the trouble without knowing it. The *Last Word* could proceed again.

"Good luck!" cried Innis.

"Come on!" yelled Dick. "We've got to chase them!"

The three made flying leaps for the car, and a moment later the strange race was on. But the other auto was out of sight.

CHAPTER XXXIII

JUST IN TIME

"SAY, they're regular kidnappers!"

"That's what! Wanting to help us was all part of the trick."

"I wonder how they overpowered him? He was a strong man."

"Chloroform, I guess."

"That's right," agreed Dick, the foregoing remarks having been made by his chums as the big car dashed along in pursuit of the other. "I smelled it," the young millionaire added.

"I do hope we can catch the scoundrels!" murmured Paul.

"It's a handicap, though, with night coming on," said Innis.

"Well, we won't stop until we have to," said Dick, grimly.

"How do you suppose they worked it?" asked Paul, as the *Last Word* careened on over the uneven way.

"They must have been trailing us," suggested Dick, as he held to the vibrating steering wheel. "Martin and Wickford probably got in touch with their crowd by telegraph after we got away

from them, and very likely mapped out the course we would probably take. They knew we had to come to San Francisco. Then they dropped out of the game—Martin and Wickford did—and some others took up the chase. The object was to get hold of Mr. Cameron so he couldn't testify."

"And they've done it," said Innis, gloomily.

"But we'll get him back!" asserted Paul.

"That's what!" declared Dick. "We'll keep on their trail until we get him away from them. Fate rather played into their hands this trip. If we hadn't become stalled they might not have caught up with us, as I was thinking of laying up over night, and they might have passed us in the evening.

"However, it can't be helped. We'll do the best we can. As soon as they saw us, when they came dashing up, they must have laid their plans. They knew our car the moment they laid eyes on it, and we were at a disadvantage, for we'd never seen them before."

"And we didn't suspect,," added Paul, gloomily.

"No," went on our hero. "I even believe they punctured that tire on purpose."

"They might have," admitted Innis. "It's a wonder that fellow didn't put your motor out of commission for keeps, Dick, while he was working over it."

"He might easily have done so. I never sus-

pected a thing. But I was watching him pretty closely, for all that, for he didn't know as much about machinery as he pretended to. He couldn't have tried any trick without my seeing him, and I guess he didn't care to take any chances.

"His game was to hold my attention while his confederates worked things so as to get Mr. Cameron near their car. Then they grabbed him, stuck a chloroformed rag over his nose to take the fight out of him, and made their get-away."

"It's lucky your motor started when it did," remarked Innis, as he clung to the sides of the swaying car.

"That's right," agreed Dick. "We might have been stalled yet, only that luck was with us. I suppose monkeying with it the way we did, we put back into adjustment some little thing that was out of gear. She's running like a sewing machine now."

And indeed the big car was responding nobly to the demands made on her. The road was very good, fortunately. It was getting dusk, but the boys had no thought of even halting for supper. There were some sandwiches they could eat later on.

Dick switched on the powerful searchlights and the path ahead of them was illumined by a brilliant glow. Mile after mile they covered, and as it happened, the only crossroads they passed were so poor that it would have been dangerous for the car ahead of them to have turned off.

"Though they may slip into some side lane, and trust to us to run past," said Paul.

"Maybe," assented Dick. "The odds are against us, but we'll keep on."

"Look!" suddenly cried Innis, pointing ahead. Through the darkness they could see a single gleam of red, like some big ruby.

"Their tail light!" cried Dick.

"Unless it's some other car," said Paul.

"We haven't passed any, though maybe we're catching up to one that came in from some side road," admitted Dick. "Here goes for a spurt. Maybe we can catch 'em!"

He threw on all the power that was safe on such a road at night, and the *Last Word* forged ahead. It was their one best chance to catch the other car, if indeed that was it, and they were taking advantage of it.

On and on they raced, the big auto swaying dangerously. Fortunately they did not have to worry about tire trouble, and this was something that might handicap the other car at a moment's notice. On and on they raced.

"The light seems to be brighter now," said Paul.

"I think we are catching up to them," agreed Innis.

"I hope so," murmured Dick. He peered ahead for a sign of any possible obstruction into which they might crash. At the speed they were keeping up, to hit anything, or have even a slight

accident, would be serious. But the big lights made the road very plain.

"They must have seen us," observed Paul.

"I fancy so," agreed Dick. "I wish we had some way of puncturing one of their tires."

Almost as he spoke there came from the car ahead of them a loud report.

"They're firing at us, just as those other fellows did!" cried Paul.

"No, that wasn't a shot!" yelled Dick. "Fellows, it's a tire blow-out. We've got 'em."

He gave the laboring motor of the *Last Word* a little more gasoline and adjusted the spark lever. The car responded promptly.

"We're overhauling 'em!" cried Innis.

The red tail light was growing more bright every moment. It could be seen that the other auto was losing speed. There was the sound of another tire giving way, and then the screech as brakes were quickly applied.

"We've got 'em!" yelled Dick. "Luck's with us to-night, all right!"

The other car was in full glare of the search-lamps of Dick's car now. Three figures were seen to leap out and make for the woods on one side of the highway.

"Mr. Cameron! Mr. Cameron!" yelled Dick. "Are you all right?"

There was no answer. A moment later the big car shot up alongside the stalled one. The boys leaped out, and a glance inside the auto they

had pursued showed them the figure of the engineer huddled up on the floor of the tonneau.

"Are you all right Have they harmed you?" asked Dick, opening one of the side doors. A murmur was the only answer he got.

"They've gagged him!" cried Paul.

A moment later the boys had the rag from the mouth of their friend, and had cut the cords that bound him. They helped him to his feet, and one of them brought him a drink of water from the big car.

"How are you?" asked Dick, anxiously.

"All—right—now," was the hesitating answer. "A little—knocked out, but still in the ring. You came just in time, boys."

"How is that?" inquired Dick.

"Ten minutes later they would have been at the railroad station, and had me aboard a train. Then they'd have taken me into the unknown again, and you'd never have gotten me until it was too late. You were just in time."

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE FORTUNE SAVED

LITTLE time was lost in transferring Mr. Cameron to Dick's big car. The young engineer was soon himself again, the slight feeling of illness, caused by the chloroform, passing off.

"Those blowouts came just in time to let us get you," remarked Dick, as he looked at the stalled car.

"Yes," agreed Mr. Cameron. "They ran so fast they overheated the shoes. I didn't think you could catch us."

"Oh, the *Last Word* can go some when she has to," said Dick, proudly. "I never called on her for as much speed as this before though. What did they do to you?"

"Nothing much, after they took me by surprise, and bundled me into their car. Then they gagged me, as I found out when I recovered my senses, and they trussed me up pretty well with the ropes. I could hear them talking, though."

"Were they some of Uncle Ezra's gang?" asked Dick.

"Yes, they were taking the place of my two former guards, Sam and Bill. I guess they had

their orders to hide me away somewhere so you boys couldn't find me until it was too late. But what are you going to do now?"

"Get something to eat, and then head for San Francisco as fast as the car will take us," said Dick. "We won't waste another minute. No telling what trick they may try next."

The meal, served in the big auto, revived them, for they were tired with the chase and worn by anxiety. Soon they all felt better and a little later they were on the move again, leaving the stalled car where doubtless the men would come back and get it.

"It's a wonder they didn't show fight when they found we were overhauling them," said Paul.

"I guess they didn't dare risk it," said Mr. Cameron. "They were taking enough chances with the law as it was. Well, I'll be glad when this is over so I can settle down to business again. I'll give my testimony as soon as I can, and then the case will be over."

As Mr. Cameron knew the roads well they made a night journey of it, coming at dawn to a fair-sized city where they stopped for gasoline. Then they continued on, and in due time came to San Francisco.

"Now what's the program?" asked Paul, when they realized that they were at the end of their journey. They had crossed this great continent.

"Get to a good lawyer, explain the case to him and have him fix matters up so your friend Wardell won't lose his fortune," said Mr. Cameron, and this was done, a call being made on Mr. Whitfield Ainslie, who was recommended by Mr. Tunison.

The lawyer agreed that no time was to be lost. Matters were put in shape for presentation to the courts, and Mr. Cameron's affidavits were filed. The papers Dick had taken such care of came in useful, though their importance was not as great as they would have been had not Mr. Cameron been able to tell what he knew.

Then came the day in court, when the other side, with the lawyers representing Mr. Larabee fighting in every way their trained legal minds could think of.

The judge heard all the testimony, including how Mr. Cameron had discovered the unexpected evidence, and how, under a misapprehension, he had agreed to keep silent about it. The manner in which Mr. Wardell gave up his railroad stock was also recited.

"Why is he himself not here to give testimony?" the judge asked.

"Because, your honor," said Mr. Ainslie, "he is really not needed. He has given Mr. Hamilton power of attorney to act for him. Besides Mr. Wardell is, I am informed by credible authority, in South America, trying to make a new fortune for himself."

"Well," remarked the judge with a little smile, "in that case I think we shall have to give him back his old one. I find for Mr. Wardell, let judgment be entered accordingly," and he signed the papers and turned them over to his clerk for formal filing.

"What does that mean?" whispered Dick to his lawyer.

"It means that you have saved Mr. Wardell's fortune for him. I congratulate you."

"Well, I had a race for it!" said Dick, grimly. "But it was fun after all."

Of course Uncle Ezra's lawyers tried their best to upset the judgment in Mr. Wardell's favor, but they were ruled out of court. Uncle Ezra even came on himself, crabbed and angry at having spent money on railroad fare.

"And so you're responsible for my losing all this money; be you, Nephew Richard?" he snarled, when he found he had lost his case.

"It wasn't yours by rights," declared Dick. "I'm sorry to have to go against you, but it was the only thing I could do."

"Humph!" sniffed Mr. Larabee. "Don't you let that pesky dog of yours nip me, or I'll sue you for damages!" he cried, as Grit growled and showed a desire to get nearer to Uncle Ezra's legs.

"Down, Grit," said Dick, quietly. "I don't suppose, Uncle Ezra," he went on, "that you'll want to ride back with us in the big auto. We'll

be touring back after we see something of California."

"I wouldn't ride with you for a farm!" snapped the old man. "Besides, I've got a return ticket an' I'm not goin' to let the railroad get the best of me. I've lost enough money as it is."

"You might sell the ticket," suggested Dick, but he hoped his relative would not ride back with him.

"Huh! Yes, and lose nigh half of it. No, sir, I'm going back in the cars!"

"Thank goodness!" exclaimed Paul in a low voice. And then, as Mr. Larabee left Dick's chum asked:

"Well, what's next on the program, old man? Do you think we'll have any more adventures like those we've just passed through?"

"I don't know," remarked Dick, musingly. And what new adventures befell him and his friends will be related in the next book of this series, to be called "Dick Hamilton's Airship; Or, A Young Millionaire in the Clouds."

Uncle Ezra departed for the East next day, a very much put-out man. He said he never would forgive his nephew.

"Now look here, Uncle Ezra," remarked our hero, solemnly. "I don't care what you think, for I know I did right in this matter. You may have been fully within the law in what you did——"

"I was, Nephew Richard. I had the law with me."

"But not the moral law," went on Dick. "You might have been the cause of Mr. Wardell taking his life. He actually contemplated that as he was in such despair at losing his fortune. I was lucky enough to prevent him, and I saved his fortune for him, for the honor of my family."

"Humph!" sniffed Uncle Ezra, as he went for his train, Grit growling a good-bye. "Wa'al, maybe it's all for the best," he added grudgingly. "I've lost a pile of money, but still I wouldn't want anybody to suicide on my account."

"And now let's forget law and legal papers and all such stuff!" cried Dick, a little later. "We're going to have a good time the rest of the summer."

And that they did need not be doubted. Dick informed his father by telegraph of the success of the trip, and later wrote the main facts to him. In turn Mr .Hamilton sent Dick a letter that had come from Mr. Wardell in South America.

Thus in possession of the address Dick wrote telling of the saving of the fortune. And, as Mr. Wardell had not been as successful in South America as he had hoped to be, he came on home, and took up the management of his affairs, so luckily preserved to him. Mr. Cameron, in recognition of his services, was made chief engineer of the railroad, a position that exactly suited him. Mr. Wardell offered Dick a substantial sum,

but the young millionaire turned it over to charity.

Criminal action might have been taken against the men who practically kidnapped him, but it was decided best to drop the matter, so they were not sought out, nor were those who had annoyed and tried to get the papers from Dick.

"And now let's tour California," said Dick one day, some time after all court matters were over. "We'll see the sights and start back across the continent so as to get to Kentfield when the football season opens!"

"That's the talk!" cried Paul Drew.

And here we will take leave of Dick Hamilton and his friends.

THE END